

SOUTHERN HUMANITIES REVIEW

**THE CLASSICAL TRADITION IN THE SOUTH:
A SPECIAL ISSUE**



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Published by Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama

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INTRODUCTION: THE CLASSICAL TRADITION IN THE SOUTH

By Susan Ford Wiltshire

A national survey in the last decade showed that of the five geographical regions in the country, the South occupies the strongest position in the study of Greek and Latin in colleges and universities, in terms both of the relative rate of growth and of the ratio of classical students to the total college population.¹ This is recent evidence of what has been a persistent affinity between the South and classical antiquity, and an inquiry into that affinity leads us into the heart of the rich and difficult complexities of Southern intellectual history.

In the Bicentennial Issue of this journal, W. David Lewis identifies the following "deep-seated Southern traits": personalism, sense of place, commitment to the land, respect for the rhythms of nature, persistence of religious awe, and lingering closeness to the affective side of human consciousness.² Those are bonding agents which Lewis is describing, and the papers that follow suggest that the Classics have formed a significant factor in mediating those bonds. With its symbols and experiences the classical past has contributed to the expression of feelings of place, of nature, of affective consciousness—and in turn, as is the wont of poetry, has helped to create them.

Another deep-seated Southern trait is, of course, a sense of history. While biblical influences have no doubt been more pervasive than classical in the Southern mind, it may well be that the tendency to approach the Bible not as history but as timeless verity helps account for the strong identification of many Southerners with the more historical Greek and Roman tradition. The same may hold with literature. In the first paper of this issue Professor Bradford details the common qualities between the literary enterprises of Rome and the American South, in both of which literature is seen not as the preserve of private sensibilities but as an expression of the public person, the citizen, who even as artist operates in relationship to family, to state, to the larger community. Vergil's *Aeneid*, for example, becomes a compelling model for the Southern imagination, from comparisons of Aeneas with Captain John Smith, implanting a people upon new shores, to perceptions of the westernmost outpost on the Brazos bottoms as the South's New Troy.

Professor Benario chronicles the development of higher education in the South, primarily a phenomenon of the nineteenth century. Greek and

Latin had long formed the basis of the educational curriculum, however, and continued to do so even as attacks on the traditional curriculum escalated in the North. If research scholarship lagged, it was in part because Southern teachers "put themselves more into the making of men than of books," although that component of classical study was greatly enhanced by the enormous influence on the classical profession and on American intellectual life of a Virginian named Basil Gildersleeve.

Gildersleeve best represents the ease and grace with which some Southerners have been able to move between the ancient and the modern worlds. His essay, "A Southerner in the Peloponnesian War," discussed here by Professor Kennedy, compares the Peloponnesian War and the Civil War as conflicts between a northern union and a southern confederacy; one a naval power, the other a land power; one progressive, the other conservative; one holding to strong centralized power, the other advocating local autonomy. Gildersleeve is quite clear about the "sophistries" possible in such comparisons—he is no determined antiquarian—but his ability to make such analogies demonstrates his sense of the relatedness of ancient and contemporary events and his belief that knowledge of one can enlarge and point one's perceptions of the other.

Milton W. Humphries is resurrected as an "Appalachian Odysseus" in the paper by Professor Berrigan. Like his ancient prototype, Humphries was largely self-taught (taking his books with him while herding his family's oxen as a boy in western Virginia); like Odysseus, too, Humphries fought in a war and then moved from place to place, pursuing his career as a classicist in Lexington, Leipzig, Nashville, Austin, and finally Charlottesville. His mentor was Robert E. Lee, through whose influence Humphries became a classicist, not because that was his first love but because that was the field that needed staffing at Washington College and Humphries wanted to be excellent at what he did.

The fifth essay in this collection turns more directly to the politics of Southern history and to the use of classical precedents in the continuing debate over the issue of slavery. Once again, easy access between past and present characterizes both the opponents and defenders of slavery, as they summon arguments from antiquity to justify their respective positions. It is suggested here that not one but two classical traditions have inhabited the South, one more progressive, the other conservative, even while sharing the common qualities of selectivity and utilitarianism.

In the concluding paper architectural historian Robert Gamble investigates the special affinity for classical motifs in Southern

residential architecture. He demonstrates the extent to which Greek Revival was a national movement, the particular qualities of life in the South which affected architectural design (the porches common in warm climates, for example, easily invite columned porticoes), and finally the nostalgia of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries which led to architectural as well as other kinds of myth-making. Although too often appearing in tasteless or facile adaptations—in sprawling subdivisions, drive-in theaters, or even new governor's mansions—these motifs, Gamble suggests, can still help form a bond, a sense of place and of belonging.

Of all the traits listed by Lewis, perhaps it is personalism that has contributed most to the Southern sense of belonging—to place, to region, to the distant as well as recent past. The habit of mind of relating in a personal way to literature and history has no doubt been enhanced by the relative persistence of an oral tradition in the South. Texas novelist Laura Krey, for example, describes long evenings of listening to the story-telling of older members of her family and concludes: "Like that I learned history—as simply as that; and even yet it seems strange to me to read it, cold and dead, shut up in books."³ Like the daughters of Milton Humphries, the author of one of the papers that follows walked the Civil War battlefields with her father and learned from him the details of many campaigns, which he in turn had learned from his grandfather, who was there.

Such a personal sense of the past always resides in the interstice between the Scylla and Charybdis of antiquarian escapism and simply wrong-headed romanticism. On the other hand, it can be—and as these papers show, has been—a source of imagery and of strength for perceiving one's place in the world, thus helping to account for the special claim of Greece and Rome upon the imagination of the South.

NOTES

1. S. Lieberman, "College Classical Enrollments, 1964-1965," *Classical World* 58 (1965), 175.
 2. W. David Lewis, "Technology and the South: A Bicentennial Perspective," *Southern Humanities Review, The Bicentennial Issue* (1976), 93.
 3. Laura Krey, *And Tell of Time* (Boston 1938), xi.
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THAT OTHER REPUBLIC: ROMANITAS IN SOUTHERN LITERATURE

By M. E. Bradford

Southern literature, like that of most other distinctive cultures, grew up in response to circumstances. Only after-the-fact did it account for itself in the language of theory. Yet even though it had developed and accumulated to a considerable degree before anyone could ask what authority it claimed or what notion of social utility it presupposed, humane letters in the South did not emerge *ex nihilo*. From colonial times on through the nineteenth century, Southern writers drew upon a literary inheritance brought with them from the England of their origination: an inheritance filtered by the Augustans, John Dryden, and the Sons of Ben.¹ Behind their creative performance we can detect, through inference and analogy, an intelligible and internally coherent poetic.² Furthermore, even after the evolution of a conscious aesthetic by the poet/critics of the Southern Renaissance, that patrimony continued to exert an influence upon almost everything of a serious nature that Southerners wrote. My purpose is to indicate how the model of Roman letters, in its relation to the Roman cultural and political enterprise, stands behind and bears upon the originally implicit (and subsequently overt) literary theory of the South and therefore illuminates most of the region's literature composed before the First World War, to say nothing of the great body of writing within (or in reaction to) that inheritance composed since 1918. For the Roman example has had a continuous and peculiar purchase upon the imagination of the Southern writer and is a key to his special (and un-American) relationship to his regional past, his sense of obligation to the *patria* and its good name.

The great bond between Roman and Southern literature is that both reflect the all-absorbing corporate spirit of the cultures for which they speak. The Southern writer, like his ancient counterpart, has almost always felt the pressure to be a *public man* and to perform a service in relation to that powerful sense of cultural identity. Poe notwithstanding, art as *gnosis*, as a private revelation facilitated by resignation or flight from society—romantic art—has never made sense in a Southern context, at least, if we agree with Lewis Simpson, not until the last few years.³ Southern and Roman letters look out toward the world, not inward into the mysteries of self. As Professor Duff observes, "Roman literature is full of [the] ineradicable [Roman] character. . . . It bore

closely upon the interests of the society and the state [and spoke with a voice] inherited from simple rural times." Its theme was conduct, not sensibility. And each of its important qualities, plus most of its identifiable kinds, can be traced back to this almost unconscious *Romanitas*. Duff concludes, ". . . the national character . . . inspires all Roman work."⁴ Nothing could be further from the aestheticism and cultural ecumene of the Alexandrian Greeks—the antitype of all things Roman as presented in Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*. Nor has the Southern writer, until the recent shift, ever really belonged to that "faraway country," the Republic of Letters, the Promethean culture of mind which insists that first loyalties belong to it alone: at least not completely—not even during the great years of the Southern Renaissance.⁵

True enough, intelligence means some degree of independent judgment: mimesis is evaluation. But for the vatic spirit or the scop, that judgment does not start from scratch. The identity is given and non-negotiable. And decisions concerning what is best for it start from the premise that it must be protected and preserved, even if by improvement. Its survival is the precondition and basis for all prospective reforms. Proposed alterations must be expected to honor that necessity. Otherwise they are to be put aside. The private intellect operates in negotiating its way within these parameters—there, and in the exercise of craft, in the skills of making. The self, even the creative self, requires a social support. The old conflict between sweetness and light, art and duty, resolve in the Horacian way. Literature cannot serve a purpose unless it be *dulce*, and could not aspire to the status of art without an audience, without being, in its burden, easily recognized and sanctioned by sensible men, without a claim of *utile*. Where this formula obtains, an academy of poets claiming their authority from sensibility, functioning as "unacknowledged legislators," is inconceivable. The vatic role, defined by the Mantuan, is as a repository of memory. Those active in its performance are like a priesthood and a guild—but always, as citizens, pointed back toward a given world where things must be respected for what they are, not outward toward the stars.

It is a familiar paradox of earlier Southern education—an education that survived even into the time of my father's youth—that its products often "knew the literature of Rome far better than they knew that of England."⁶ The Roman literature that Southerners read was, to be sure, selective: particularly Virgil, Horace, and the historians. But it was precisely the literature that Augustan Englishmen looked to as the purest expression of the Roman spirit,⁷ and the kind of literature which

the Romans themselves expected to encourage judgment, probity, and *virtus*. The Revolution—the fact that the United States had become a republic, the first significant nation with such institutions and such a form of government since antiquity—of course intensified the purchase of the Roman literary performance on Anglo-Saxons this side of the Atlantic. And the desire for American books was similarly suited to the encouragement of a public virtue. For the Revolution had come when there was a general fear that such virtue was on the decline in Europe and seemed likely to fail even here. *Romanitas*, they realized, had under similar circumstances used literature to fight a defensive action in an era of the civil wars and during the Golden Age. It had therefore left behind it instruments formed to serve a kindred purpose.

Biography was indubitably the most important of these: biography of and about Romans; biography of the sort usually associated with the name of Plutarch⁸; and history (or heroic poems) embodying the corporate character in the record of its formation as a colony, its resistance to and removal of unworthy kings, the expansion of its frontiers in the subjection of hostile neighboring tribes and in civil and foreign wars. Narratives of travel, exploration, and early settlement where that composite personality discovered some of its direction and endured numerous tests, were natural supporting materials, as were speeches from the men involved in these national adventures and moral essays (in the vein of Cicero) on conduct and common problems. Add to this list a social poetry, manuals for the practice of certain arts or useful skills, and reams of law, and it becomes complete.

A small number of specific Southern books will serve to illustrate the direct influence of the Roman poetic, and of the corporate spirit which it embodies, on the literature of our region. The sampling must, of course, be highly selective. But I shall attempt to draw upon representative works in each epoch in our literary history, concluding with final emphasis on how this inheritance has continued to influence in a special way the poetics rendered in the fiction and poetry of the Southern Renaissance itself.

To demonstrate the classical and essentially Roman spirit of colonial Southern literature is an easy task. And in the past twenty years, much of it has been performed.⁹ For one proof, we may look to the moral essays written under Latin pseudonyms in the early Southern press; to the prevalence of the classical elegy, the poem of natural consolation¹⁰; or to the taste for comic “social” drama, verse satire, the survey of “natural history,” and the practical study of political problems.¹¹ But from the beginning the most important artifacts were books of history and

exploratory adventure. The *Agricola* of Tacitus stands behind the encomium upon Captain John Smith, entitled *The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia* (Oxford, 1612)—and also Virgil. For, according to Professor Howard Mumford Jones, "The word 'epic' throws a flood of light upon the structure of the work, which is in twelve books and which narrates the fortunes of two nations, opposed in peace and war. The figure of Aeneas-Smith, the transplanter to new shores of a wandering, yet divinely guided people is dramatically contrasted with that of Powhatan, and both are sketched in grand and simple outline."¹² Sallust is present in accounts of Bacon's Rebellion; Pliny and Cicero in the "letters for publication" sent to England; and the moral spirit of Livy, fearful of the corruptions of misgovernment, wealth, and a gentle climate, in Hugh Jones and Robert Beverley's *History and Present State of Virginia* (1722). But, as I noted earlier, the most interesting material comes after the birth of our Republic and the development in the South of the idea that the new nation's meaning and nature are best understood below the old surveyor's line.

When General Washington retired from military service, he ordered in bronze for his chimney piece, while planning a return to Mount Vernon, "A Groupe of Aeneas carrying his father out of Troy."¹³ This was a way of specifying what he and his generation believed they had done and a warning to the careless among future intellectual and cultural historians inclined to overemphasize the force of the rationalist Enlightenment in their political thought.¹⁴ The motif runs through the treatment of the Revolution given by biographers and historians writing in the early years of the Republic. To its hold on the Southern imagination, I shall return shortly. But it is from the literature of circumstantial problems, difficulties of the kind that we associate with keeping up the domestic establishment for which hearth and chimney are a centerpiece, that I must draw my next example of a Southern equivalent to Roman compositions. No steward of the old agrarian regime in Virginia, of the American version of republican virtue, speaks with greater authority than John Taylor of Caroline. His *Arator*, a treatise on farming and the place of agriculture in a healthy national life, recalls unmistakably Roman treatises on that art¹⁵ and particularly their archetype, the *De Agricultura* of Cato the Censor.

Taylor's book, like Cato's, is chiefly practical: on the maintenance of his fields and fences, the care of domestic animals, the management of servants, and the selection of crops; on these and the other "offices" (some of a moral or religious nature) that belong to the planter's station. But his larger theme, like that of his Roman predecessor, is the preservation of a rural regime and of a republic which draws its

disposition and direction from a normative rural past. And both insist that the kind of culture they depict is in full accord with constant components of human nature. The city, the commercial spirit, the complications of banking and credit are anathema to these industrious, homely aristocrats. Writes the grave Censor of the wisdom of the Fathers: "And when they would praise a worthy man their praise took this form: 'good husbandman, good farmer'; one so praised was thought to have received the greatest commendation."¹⁶ Taylor could not agree more, for the thematic core of his *Arator* is No. 59, "The Pleasures of Agriculture."¹⁷ He writes, "Poetry, in allowing more virtue to agriculture, than to any other profession, has abandoned her privilege of fiction, and yielded to the natural moral effect of the absence of temptation. The same fact is commemorated by religion, upon the occasion most solemn, within the scope of the human imagination."

Poetry written in the Old South, both before and after the War Between the States, also reflects the public aesthetic implicit in Roman literature. We should remember that the ode survived in Dixie until the later part of the century, as did the other social forms of verse, even the Horatian "moral essay." In the latter category, we may consider William Grayson's "The Hireling and the Slave."¹⁸ The genre of this poem is a puzzle which only the Roman analogies will help us to solve. If the spirit of Cato and the historians is (with that of their Southern descendants or imitators) hard pastoral, emphasizing rural life as a discipline and nature as a test, then we have to identify the poetic ruralism of Virgil and Horace as something else. Yet their lyrics and satires are not set in the escapist Arcadia of the Greeks. Whether they write odes or meditations, essays, or epistles, their counsel and condemnation issue ordinarily from the cultivated garden of a middle situation which is both bountiful *and* modest, rich *and* temperate.¹⁹ And so does Grayson's. His target is the hypocritical benevolence of Exeter Hall, the intellectual center of abolitionist sentiment in England, and the American spokesmen for the same sort of anti-communal, laissez-faire preachment that says, in a brief summary, "Let the white wage slave fend for himself, but pity the well-protected Negro of the South and condemn his paternalistic owner."²⁰ Grayson as satirist is a marvelous anachronism, writing verse portraits in heroic couplets in the "legislative style" of Dryden and Pope (as did they in the style of Horace) some eighty years after the manner had gone out of fashion in the remainder of the English-speaking world.²¹ From his garden at Beaufort he (and the South through him) could look at that world with a conscious confidence that the proverbial Southern backwardness which he bespoke had solid antecedents and an honest reason to be angry with the private speculations of private men: men who

were confused by their ownership of anything because nothing owned a share in them. As the traditional *vir bonus* of this kind of poem, a voice functioning in a socially sanctioned role, Grayson is as sure in his performance, as calm and solid and easy (he was a figure of *gravitas* and a man of great learning) as Dryden in his *Religio Laici*; but only *because* he speaks out of a prescription, with more than personal authority, which was a rare thing in 1856.

After defeat in the war (which was for Southerners the Fall of their Republic) the social pressure on the imagination of the Southern writers resembled that felt by the Roman historians who were asked, under Caesar, to preserve the memory of better days and thus promote the Roman virtue rooted there. *Romanitas* combined easily with an elegiac thrust. And so it was with the Southern soldiers and apologists whose achievements are considered in the pages of Richard Weaver's *The Southern Tradition at Bay*.²² I mention here only Alexander H. Stephens' *A Constitutional View of the War Between the States, Its Causes, Character, Conduct and Results, Presented in a Series of Colloquies at Liberty Hall*.²³ The book (in two volumes) is no mere narrative or apologia, but, like Cicero's *De Republica*, a complete theoretical discussion of American government, based on history and experience, on possibility developed in dialogue, with speakers representing recognizable components of the American composite. But there are many more mere essays, political meditations, memorial verses, biographies, and autobiographies that are also intelligible as responses to a theory of belle lettres that was originally Roman. And annals! And public letters! And careful keeping of the "linen rolls," with families by the generation. Here I cannot delay to unfold all the connections that might be made. For a concluding word must be said about Southern writing after the region came to the crossing of the ways, of which Allen Tate wrote forty years ago.²⁴ For sometime after 1918, the question developed as to whether or not Southern literature would continue to speak with its old corporate voice. Its answer until very recently was *both yes and no*. And thus was equivocal, for reasons that we shall never understand apart from the vatic, Roman spirit of Southern writing before that date.

The dialectical, unincorporated temper of modern Southern letters, at least until we began to get confessional poetry, the novel as lyric, and the evocation of pure consciousness, has been greatly exaggerated. There are, to be sure, all sorts of exceptions. But many of the most famous Southern fictions and poems of this period, when they treat of unincorporated man, pure intellect, or sensibility, do so only to expose the breed. What they imply is that such creatures cannot be said to be

truly alive. Mr. Tate has also advised us (in "The Southern Mode of the Imagination") that the creative impulse behind Southern writing put away a rhetorical world and moved to a dialectical situation when the Southern Renaissance began.²³ This formula is all too simple. Only after 1950 is that transition complete. And there is some real doubt that the Southern temper is even today simply dialectical—open to all possibilities, with nothing given. For one thing, it is a distinctive feature of the major Southern novels written during the great years of the Renaissance that an enveloping action contains and modifies their narrative core. The action proper of so many of these works is, in fact, the correction of private mania by the laws governing history and nature, as they inform some character of their stubborn reality. To live with and through such laws, to urge the prescription, the *mos majorum* in its highest sense, is often the challenge taken up by the protagonists or speakers in these works—or else the pathos of their inability to respond to that admonition. The motif of transplantation, of civil continuity, not innovation, in the West is in evidence throughout modern Southern literature: the motif of the *Aeneid*, sounded in *The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia*. We think immediately of poems by Bishop, Davidson, and Tate; and of such novels as Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Great Meadow*—in which the *paterfamilias* sends his children, their families, and friends out from his house to cross the mountains into Kentucky with the rolling first lines of Virgil's invocation: "I sing of arms and the hero, who, fate driven, first came from the shores of Troy. . . ."²⁴ Yet the theme of pious continuity is often there even in the least known productions of this imaginative explosion: in books like the unjustly neglected *And Tell of Time*, by the Texas novelist, Laura Krey. There the Brazos bottom is the westernmost outpost of the South's New Troy. And the Darcys, the sons of Aeneas, facing the same old foes, are able to speak of that old Rome on the Tiber, "as if by kinship."²⁵

With this sense of incorporation with a larger European past, of the New World as a perfection—not a rejection—of the Old, it is no wonder that the central figure, the formal protagonist, in much Southern fiction is not an individual at all, but a family, its living members, ancestors, the hope of a posterity, and the principle which such families embody. Sartoris is the central character in Faulkner's *The Unvanquished*; Fairchild, the protagonist in Miss Welty's *Delta Wedding*; Llewellyn at stake in Caroline Gordon's *Penhally*. Two families share the center of the stage in Stark Young's *So Red the Rose*. And the voice which we hear in the poetry of Davidson, as well as in much more Southern verse than we are sometimes led to believe, is certainly not that of a private man: not that of a poetic Icarus (James Joyce), flying upward. Yet Davidson is a

poet, nonetheless: not excluded from the definition by his posture as *vates*. And there is nothing "unpoetic" about the "public" compositions of Ransom, Fletcher, Warren, and Tate—poems in which they speak out of something more than their private experience or private reason, often acknowledging the boundaries of an occasion or a question affecting their total culture.

Nor is there anything intellectually illegitimate in the gathering of Southern scholars, swapping "country" stories in the home of the Agrarian John Donald Wade, as reported in Louis Rubin's fine narrative of that event. The guest in Marshalville is a puzzled Northern scholar.²⁹ The performance of his hosts, a rehearsal (in the *patois*) of oneness antecedent to vocation, understandably befuddles the Princeton professor; for such a combination of identities was precluded by his idea of the man of letters—an idea native to his own very different culture. It is not that other, more familiar and modern notion of artist as man apart which stands behind the voice we hear in Tate's "Aeneas at Washington." A conscious continuity with the Roman enterprise is the authority for these lines, a continuity antedating the Southern Renaissance:

I stood in the rain, far from home at nightfall
By the Potomac, the great Dome lit the water,
The city my blood had built. I knew no more
While the screech-owl whistled his new delight
Consecutively dark. Stuck in the wet mire
Four thousand leagues from the ninth buried city
I thought of Troy, what we had built her for.³⁰

Mr. Tate has a prescriptive right to use Virgil in this way. He operates with the authority of essentially the same myth, and to related ends. To maintain that the poetics Southerners drew originally from the Roman model, the poetics which assumes that citizen and artist are not exclusive categories, are unable to produce serious art, is of course to deny the worth of Virgil, of Shakespeare's history plays, and much of Dostoevski. And it is also to perceive the acknowledged achievement of Southern writers of Tate's generation as a dreadful anomaly. The course followed by the region's literature in more recent years, as the double vision from the crossroads evaporated, argues that the pattern is the other way around. In any case, the corporate spirit, the *Romanitas* of Southern letters comes clear most easily when seen against the background of its ancient prototype, and our understanding of this literature as a specific inheritance is greatly enhanced.

NOTES

1. See a remark by Robert Bain on p. 79 of *Southern Literary Study* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), ed. by Louis D. Rubin, Jr.
2. A notion of the purpose of literature, what it is for, and what it is not supposed to do. See Louis D. Rubin, *The Writer in the South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972), pp. 1-33, especially p. 17.
3. Lewis P. Simpson, *The Dispossessed Garden* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975).
4. J. Wright Duff, *A Literary History of Rome: From the Origins to the Close of the Golden Age* (New York: Barnes and Nobel, 1960), pp. 29-44. Also in the same vein are pp. 112-126 of R. H. Barrow's *The Romans* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1949) and Frank O. Copley's *Latin Literature From the Beginnings to the Close of the Second Century A. D.* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969).
5. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., *The Faraway Country: Writers of the Modern South* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963); Lewis P. Simpson, *The Man of Letters in New England and the South: Essays on the Literary Vocation in America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), pp. 229-255.
6. Richard M. Gummere, *The American Colonial Mind and the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 15. Gummere says this of colonial Americans in general though, as he recognizes, it came to be peculiarly true of the South as the years passed.
7. James William Johnson, *The Formation of English Neo-Classical Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 91-105.
8. *Fame and the Founding Fathers: Essays by Douglass Adair*, ed. by Trevor Colbourn (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1974), p. 13 *et passim*; concerning the overwhelming impact of Plutarch on colonial Americans.
9. See, for instance, Richard Beale Davis, *Literature and Society in Early Virginia, 1608-1840* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973) and J. A. Leo Lemay's *Men of Letters in Colonial Maryland* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972). Professor Davis is preparing a complete history of colonial Southern literature, forthcoming from the University of Tennessee Press in 1977.
10. See the remark of Richard Beale Davis in *Southern Literary Study*, p. 97. The most interesting of these are John Cotton's contrapuntal epitaphs for Bacon.
11. William Byrd of Westover tells us of this taste in his "A Progress to the Mines." His "The History of the Dividing Line" reminds us of Pliny and Strabo—a mixture of natural history, geography, and travel literature—all defining the culture he comes from as well as the strange things he sees. William Bartram's *Travels* and John Lawson's *A New Voyage to Carolina*, if taken together, represent the same mixture, as does Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*—natural history, political description, and social theory tied down by the real.
12. *The Literature of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968), p. 28. Smith's *General History* owes more directly to Caesar's *Gallic Wars*.
13. Gummere, p. 13.
14. See my "A Teaching for Republicans: Roman History and the Nation's First Identity," *Intercollegiate Review*, XI (Winter-Spring, 1976), 67-81.
15. I mean also Varro's *Rerum Rusticarum* and Columbella's *De Re Rustica*.
16. I cite p. 3 of *On Agriculture* by Marcus Porcius Cato, in the Loeb series, edited by William Davis Hooper (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

17. See pp. 188-191 of *Arator, Being a Series of Agricultural Essays, Practical and Political* (Petersburg, Va.: John M. Carter, 1818). I cite here the 5th edition, revised and enlarged.
 18. See pp. 21-45 of *The Hireling and the Slave, Chicora, and Other Poems* (Charleston: McCord and Company, 1856).
 19. See Reuben A. Bower, *Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 163-187.
 20. Grayson's pro-slavery argument is a relative of that developed in George Fitzhugh's *Cannibals A'!! Or Slaves Without Masters* (1857). Both derive from English Tory social thought.
 21. On the design of the poem, see Edmund Wilson's *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 336-341.
 22. *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Post Bellum Thought* (New Rochelle, N. Y.: Arlington House, 1968), edited by George Core and M. E. Bradford. The documents Weaver examines are for the most part prose—in the vein of William Wirt's earlier life of Patrick Henry and (sometimes) of Parson Weems.
 23. *A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States* (Philadelphia: National Publishing Company, 1868).
 24. Allen Tate, *Collected Essays* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1959), p. 28: "From the peculiarly historical consciousness of the Southern writer has come good work of a special order; but the focus of this consciousness is quite temporary. It has made possible the curious burst of intelligence that we get by the crossing of the ways, not unlike, on an infinitesimal scale, the outburst of poetic genius at the end of the sixteenth century when commercial England had already begun to crush feudal England." The same could be said of Roman literature with the end of the Republic.
 25. *Collected Essays*, pp. 554-568. John Guilds puts the question concerning continuity between earlier and more recent Southern literature and observes that most scholars answer in the negative. See *Southern Literary Study*, p. 130. These scholars often echo Tate.
 26. This theme is developed in Louise Cowan's "The Pietas of Southern Poetry," on pp. 95-114 of *South: Modern Southern Literature in Its Cultural Setting* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1961), edited by Louis D. Rubin, Jr. and Robert D. Jacobs.
 27. *The Great Meadow* (New York: The Literary Guild, 1930), pp. 120-121. Concerning Virgil's influence on this novel, see "New Troy in the Bluegrass: Vergilian Metaphor and *The Great Meadow*," *Mississippi Quarterly*, XXII (Winter, 1968-69), 39-46, by Jo Reinhard Smith.
 28. *And Tell of Time* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1938), pp. 535, 117; 693, 704.
 29. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., *The Writer in the South*, pp. 82-90. The story should be read in its entirety. Professor Rubin has written a great deal about the emancipation of the Southern man of letters.
 30. *The Swimmers and Other Poems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p.6.
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THE CLASSICS IN SOUTHERN HIGHER EDUCATION

By Herbert W. Benario

Harvard College was founded in 1636. It remained unique in the Colonies until the College of William and Mary became the second institution of higher learning in 1693. The pace of foundation quickened markedly in the eighteenth century, beginning with Yale College in 1701 and continuing with the College of Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania) in 1740, the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) in 1746, King's College (now Columbia University) in 1754, the College of Rhode Island (now Brown University) in 1764, Queen's College (now Rutgers University) in 1766, and Dartmouth College in 1769. Thus, as the year of Revolution began, all the colleges in the Colonies were in the North save one, and New Jersey, indeed, one of the smallest of the thirteen, could boast of two for itself.

Soon after the establishment of the United States, several Southern states took the lead in the chartering of state universities. Georgia was the first, with a charter dating to 1785, but the doors of its university did not open until after North Carolina's had already begun to function, in 1795. But perhaps the most significant foundation in the South in this period came in 1819 with the University of Virginia, more the product of one man's dreams, aspirations, plans, philosophy, and architecture than any of its predecessors. Not long afterward, a flurry of foundations under church auspices changed the appearance of Southern higher education, along with the continuing establishment of state universities, either *de novo* or by absorption of existing colleges.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, obviously, most Southerners who wished advanced education went to the North or to the mother country. Travel overland within the South or between North and South was not easy or free from hazard. A sea voyage between Charleston or Savannah, for example, and Philadelphia, New York, or Boston was much to be preferred; in the second half of the eighteenth century, the College of New Jersey, with its Presbyterian origin and its strongly classical and religious education under John Witherspoon, was a favorite among the Southern gentry. Southern gentlemen were no different from their Northern peers in their belief that education should be based upon a mixture of Scripture and the Classics. This tradition remained dominant, although not without challenge from the supporters

of more practical studies, until the era of the Civil War and Reconstruction, when the planter's society, so similar to that of fifth century Athens in appreciation of leisure and its constructive use, made possible by slaves, came to an abrupt end.

Colonial America produced only one man who could at all be called a "classical scholar" in the modern sense. This was the eminent James Logan of Philadelphia, whose achievements won him recognition in England and at home, with his botanical studies, written in Latin, and his translations of Cato's *Distichs* and Cicero's *De Senectuate*. His ease with the ancient languages was unquestionably equalled by William Byrd of Westover, whose exquisite education in England and Holland left him with a lifelong appreciation of the Classics which he evermore honed. During a long and busy life, involved in the politics and administration of the colony of Virginia and the management of his own substantial estate and business interests, he seldom missed the daily enjoyment of early morning reading in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, for edification and self-improvement.

But Byrd was not typical. Many of the men of the South who studied the Classics in the eighteenth century never attained that degree of facility and were dependent upon translation; herein they did not differ at all from their brethren in the North. Of Patrick Henry, John Adams wrote in 1774: "Henry said he had no public Education. At fifteen he read Virgill and Livy, and has not looked into a Latin Book since."¹ Yet, a year later, Henry said, in his speech to the Convention of Delegates, "I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience. I know of no way of judging the future but by the past."² It is hard to believe that experience's lamp could have been any other than that of ancient history: how did Henry come to know of it? And perhaps we need not think that his oratorical luster owed no debts to Demosthenes and Cicero.

Perhaps the two best Latinists in the South in the era of the Revolution were George Wythe and Thomas Jefferson. Wythe was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and soon thereafter was appointed by the Trustees of the College of William and Mary, among whose number was Jefferson, as the first Professor of Law in the Colonies. His Latin, in the study of which Jefferson considered him his master, was easy and elegant; his wider interest in and knowledge of the classical world perhaps bore their most conspicuous fruit during the Constitutional Convention, when, along with Madison, he championed a mixed form of government, based upon Polybius.

No school or college, however, could claim credit for Wythe's virtuosity. Much of his early education he obtained from his mother, "a woman of unusual knowledge and strength of mind. She was intimately acquainted with and spoke the Latin language fluently, and it was from her that her young son received instruction in the rudiments of both Latin and Greek."³ This in itself is of interest, for that fact reveals that females were not excluded from instruction, normally by tutoring, in the classical languages. In his early thirties, after a decade of excessive enjoyment of his inheritance, "he turned again to his studies, and by his unceasing toil soon became the best educated man in the State. He was above all known for his broad and comprehensive knowledge of the Classics."⁴ Wythe "raised upon the original foundation, whencesoever acquired, a superstructure of ancient literature which has been rarely equalled in this country. He was perfectly familiar with the authors of Greece and Rome; read them with the same ease, and quoted them with the same promptitude that he could the authors in his native tongue."⁵

This brilliance was put at the disposal of the Commonwealth in long service as a professor at the College of William and Mary; among his pupils may be mentioned Jefferson, Monroe, and Marshall. The College was at the height of its prestige. "It was the great training ground for lawyers and politicians, and Virginians who expected to attain any distinction in their native State were usually educated there. The only other college attended by a considerable number of southerners was Princeton College, New Jersey, but its importance to the South could not compare with that of William and Mary."⁶ How many, who helped make a revolution and a nation, were the intellectual products of Witherspoon and Wythe!

Of Jefferson's knowledge of the Classics little need here be said; a life-long student and connoisseur, he was, like his fellow Argonaut from Massachusetts,⁷ an exemplar of how modern thought could be molded by ancient. It is illuminating to mark how often the Classics were invoked by both him and Adams during the course of that remarkable correspondence which followed their reconciliation, after long estrangement, in 1812 and continued to the last days of their lives, which ended simultaneously, in the richness of years, on the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. They ranged over almost every possible subject worthy of the attention of cultivated men, but politics and history particularly appealed, and herein the ancients afforded instruction and pleasure.⁸ Jefferson writes, in early 1812, "I have given up newspapers in exchange for Tacitus and Thucydides, for Newton and Euclid; and I find myself much the happier." Adams replies,

"I have read Thucydides and Tacitus, so often, and at such distant Periods of my Life, that elegant, profound and enchanting as to their Style, I am weary of them. When I read them I seem to be only reading the History of my own Times and my own Life. I am heartily weary of both; i.e. of recollecting the History of both: for I am not weary of Living." Yet, a few years later (1816), Adams uses Tacitus as his starting point for a discussion on political morality: "The Morality of Tacitus, is the Morality of Patriotism."

The South of the period of Jefferson's death was far different from the South of his youth. In the earlier era, higher education meant William and Mary, a college in the North or abroad, private instruction, or self tuition. By the 1820s, there were already numbers of colleges and several state universities, the most impressive of the new foundations being his own University of Virginia.¹⁰ There developed a certain uniformity, so that it is now possible to speak of a pattern in Southern higher education. In general, all secondary schools and colleges taught Latin and Greek because of the general belief that these two languages were the bases of education. Mathematics and English also had significant place, but the sciences tended to be neglected. There was little change in college curricula during the third of a century prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. Not that there were no objections to this traditional offering. In 1852, *The Southern Quarterly Review* deplored the decline in the study of the Classics in Northern colleges and the introduction of the elective system: "We have not at present the means of knowing what amount of classical studies was pursued in the early existence of these colleges. We have reason to believe that it was considerably more than at present."¹¹ Oh lament all too modern!

Few men from the South will grace a survey of classical scholarship in his era; the fault, if such it be, was hardly their own. "The best Southern teachers," it has been said, "in higher institutions of learning as well as in lower, have, as a rule, put themselves more into the making of men than of books; partly because they considered the former more important, still more because heavy teaching left little energy for writing."¹² In Sandys' *History of Classical Scholarship*, the South is almost totally ignored. But Sandys, of course, quite properly omitted evaluations of scholars still alive; this policy affected one eminent man who would otherwise have merited distinguished inclusion.

But before I turn to him, let me mention one name, little known, I suspect, which may be chosen as representative of classical studies in the South at their best in the first part of the nineteenth century. This was

Gessner Harrison, professor of ancient languages at the University of Virginia from 1828 to 1859. He was twenty-one years old when first appointed, and had only just graduated from the University, but he proved to be "the man who, of all others, had . . . the greatest influence upon the university, and through his students upon Southern life and thought."¹³ Harrison dominated the classical field until a younger man joined him as colleague for the last three years of his tenure before his resignation. This was Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve, whose unique qualities and yet unforeseen opportunities initiated a new era in American classical scholarship.

Gildersleeve, having graduated from Princeton in 1849 and then having studied in Germany for four years, received his Ph.D. from the University of Göttingen in 1853, followed that with three years of intensive private study, and was appointed professor of Greek at the University of Virginia in 1856. He was one of the first of a wave of Americans who pursued advanced work in Germany and who brought back with them a sense and appreciation of what philology, as understood in Germany, was, and he soon became one of the dominant figures of the profession. He served Jefferson's University for twenty years, for a lustrum (1861-66) simultaneously as Professor of Latin, when other matters dominated the attention of the South and the Union. In 1876, Gildersleeve accepted a call to Johns Hopkins University.

The Baltimore merchant Johns Hopkins, by generous bequest, made possible the establishment of the university which bears his name. The man chosen as its first president, Daniel Coit Gilman, had a vision of an institution markedly different from those which dotted the American scene. He foresaw the need, in the United States, of universities which would, like those of Germany, focus upon research and the training of scholars by scholars, rather than the old collegiate curriculum which aimed at the inculcation of piety and good character. The recent innovation of electives for part of the previously stringent program had not significantly changed the quality or depth of education. Gilman believed that a university was its faculty, and he gathered around him an extraordinarily distinguished group of colleagues, of whom Gildersleeve was one of the first appointments.

When Gildersleeve died in early 1924, in his ninety-third year, he could look back upon almost sixty years of active teaching, in which he had helped transform a course of study and the concept of higher education.¹⁴ Through his writings, many of which are still basic works, his establishment and long editorship of the *American Journal of Philology*, and the numerous students, about seventy in number, whose work and

dissertations he directed and who seemed to dominate the classical field for several generations, Gildersleeve gave the United States international prestige and the South new luster, both through his own origins and his new university, which, located south of the Mason-Dixon line, was long thought of, and still is by many, as a leading ornament of the South.

NOTES

1. *Diary of John Adams*, II, 151, ed. by L. H. Butterfield (Cambridge, 1961).
 2. H. Trevor Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience. Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1965), frontispiece.
 3. L. S. Herrink, "George Wythe," *The John P. Branch Historical Papers of Randolph-Macon College*, 3 (1912), p. 284.
 4. *Ibid.*, 286
 5. W. Edwin Hemphill, *George Wythe, America's First Law Professor and the Teacher of Jefferson, Marshall, and Clay* (Emory University M.A. thesis 1933), p. 11.
 6. Herrink, p. 299.
 7. Jefferson to Adams, Mar. 25, 1826: "My grandson Th: Jefferson Randolph, being on a visit to Boston, would think he had seen nothing were he to leave it without having seen you. Altho' I truly sympathise with you in the trouble these interruptions give, yet I must ask for him permission to pay to you his personal respects. Like other young people, he wishes to be able, in the winter nights of old age, to recount to those around him what he heard and learnt of the Heroic age preceding his birth, and which of the Argonauts particularly he was in time to have seen." (Lester J. Cappon, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters* [Chapel Hill, 1959], p. 613) This is the major part of the last letter from Jefferson to Adams; the latter's prompt response, under date of April 17, was his last to Jefferson. The Heroic age was almost at an end, with the passing of two of its greatest figures.
 8. Susan Ford, "Thomas Jefferson and John Adams on the Classics," *Arion*, (1967), 116-132.
 9. Lester J. Cappon, *op. cit.*, pp. 291, 295, 462.
 10. See Richard Beale Davis, *Intellectual Life in Jefferson's Virginia 1790-1830* (Chapel Hill, 1964), chap. 2, particularly "Higher Learning," pp. 46-69.
 11. Edgar W. Knight, *Readings in American Educational History* (New York, 1951), pp. 267-269.
 12. Charles Forster Smith, "The South's Contribution to Classical Studies," *The South in the Building of the Nation*, 7 (Richmond, 1909), pp. 135-172; the quotation is from the first page.
 13. *Ibid.* p. 137.
 14. *Dictionary of American Biography*, 7, pp. 278-282; Gilman appears in the same volume, pp. 299-303.
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A SOUTHERNER IN THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR

By George Kennedy

Basil L. Gildersleeve emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the first great American classicist visible on an international stage: founder of the first American graduate department of Classics and of the first American journal devoted to classical scholarship and one of the founders of the American Philological Association. He was also a man deeply influenced by and profoundly attached to the South. Because Gildersleeve was such a towering figure—and that was both literally and metaphorically true and in many ways: as teacher, scholar, critic, and humanist—it seems appropriate to consider him further in hopes of passing on to another generation an affectionate remembrance of the one whom Paul Shorey, speaking for all American classicists, called “our leader.” “If we are to be judged by our leader,” he told the American Philological Association on its fiftieth anniversary, “we need fear no comparisons.”¹

And though much might be said about Gildersleeve, I have chosen to present him not as a teacher or scholar, but as a Southern man of letters. In the 1890's the Boston blue-blooded *Atlantic Monthly* published a number of essays that reflected on the experience of the War Between the States from Northern and Southern points of view. Gildersleeve wrote two such articles by invitation: “The Creed of the Old South,” published in the January, 1892, *Atlantic*, and “A Southerner in the Peloponnesian War,” which appeared in the September, 1897, edition. They continued to be appreciated and in 1915 were re-published, with some notes, in a small volume which took the first essay as its title, *The Creed of the Old South*.²

During the War Gildersleeve had combined his duties as professor at the University of Virginia with service in the Confederate Cavalry, or as he put it, “earned the right to teach southern youth for nine months by sharing the fortunes of their fathers and brothers at the front for three.”³ He fought in several engagements, saw the war in all its heroism and tragedy, and suffered with his fellow Virginians the humiliation and deprivation of the last years of the war and of the period of reconstruction until called to his chair as the first professor at the new university in Baltimore in 1876.

“The Creed of the Old South” is not expressly classical in content, though filled with classical allusion. What Gildersleeve understood as that Creed might be summed up by the following:

To us submission meant slavery, as it did to Pericles and the Athenians; as it did to the great historian of Greece [he means George Grote], who had learned this lesson from the Peloponnesian war, and who took sides with the Southern States, to the great dismay of his fellow-radicals, who could not see, as George Grote saw, the real point at issue in the controversy. Submission is slavery. . . .⁴

Gildersleeve was a bold and energetic rhetorician. He immediately goes on the offensive and seizes the word slavery, which he applies to the actions of the North against the South. Black slavery, on the other hand, which Abolitionists regarded as the cause of the war, Gildersleeve presents as "a test case" in the question of states' rights and as already answered:

Some who had read the signs of the times knew that slavery was doomed by the voice of the world, and that no theory of society would withstand the advance of the new spirit; and if the secret of all hearts could have been revealed, our enemies would have been astounded to see how many thousands and tens of thousands in the Southern States felt the crushing burden and the awful responsibility of the institutions which we were supposed to be defending with the melodramatic fury of pirate kings.⁵

Gildersleeve was morally opposed to slavery, but like many others had hardened himself to it and saw it chiefly as an economic and political problem. It was in fact one aspect of Southern life which made that life comparable in his eyes to the world of the Greeks.

"A Southerner in the Peloponnesian War," the second and more classical of the essays, is an elaboration of the analogy between the Peloponnesian War and the American Civil War. Gildersleeve points out the dangers and sophistries in such comparisons but still is drawn to the simile, for it unites two events in which he felt much involved:

There were jealousies enough [he says] between Athens and Sparta in the olden times, which correspond to our colonial days, and in the Persian war, which was in a sense the Greek war of independence. In like manner the chronicles of our Revolutionary period show that there was abundance of bad blood between Northern and Southern colonies.⁶

The Peloponnesian war, like our war, was a war between two leagues, a Northern Union and a Southern Confederacy. The Northern Union, represented by Athens, was a naval power. The Southern Confederacy, under the leadership of Sparta, was a land power. The Athenians represented the progressive element, the Spartans the conservative. The Athenians believed in a strong centralized government. The Lacedaemonians professed greater regard for autonomy. A little ingenuity, a good deal of hardihood, might multiply such futilities indefinitely.⁷

Such feats [he frankly admits] imperil one's intellectual honesty, and one would not like to imitate the Byzantine historians who were given to similar tricks. One of these gentlemen, Choricus by name, had a seaport to describe. How the actual seaport lay mattered little to Choricus, so long as the Epidamnus of Thucydides was at hand; and if the task of narrating our Peloponnesian war were assigned to the ghost of Choricus, I have no doubt that he would open it with a description of Charleston in terms of Epidamnus. Little matters of topography would not trouble such an one. To the sophist an island is an island, a river a river, a height a height everywhere. Sphacteria would furnish the model for Morris Island, the Achelous would serve indifferently for Potomac or Mississippi, the Epipolae for Missionary Ridge; Plataea for Vicksburg; the harbor of Syracuse for Hampton Roads; and Thucydides' description of the naval engagement and the watching crowds would be made available for the fight between Merrimac and Monitor.⁸

The analogy is entertaining, but not the real point. Gildersleeve breaks off and, in his Pindaric way, buzzes to another flower. The essay seems very discursive, and the six numbered sections almost arbitrary divisions, but there is in fact a plan which the opening of section three reveals. In the first section Gildersleeve discusses the *process* of war. He himself assumes the congenial role of grammarian and asks is war a concrete or abstract noun? The usual grammatical answer is abstract, but the correct answer is concrete. The American student abroad is asked, "Is this your first ruin?" The soldier learns that war is concrete when he sees his first dead man on the field. Section two deals with the *causes* of war, which resolve themselves into the elements of hatred, common throughout history. The Peloponnesian and American Civil Wars come forward here side by side. Section three looks at the *details* of the two wars: what is significant, what is trivial. Section four seeks some statement of how the experience of war contributes to an understanding of history. This paper, Gildersleeve says, "belongs to the class of inartistic performances of which Aristotle speaks so slightly. It has no unity except the accidental unity of person. "The war,"—the American Civil War—Gildersleeve says,

was a good time for the study of the conflict between Athens and Sparta. It was a great time for reading and rereading classical literature generally, for the South was blockaded against garlic and salt. . . . The Southerner, always conservative in his tastes and no great admirer of American literature, which had become largely alien to him, went back to his English classics, his ancient classics. Old gentlemen past the military age furbished up their Latin and Greek. Some of them never let their Latin and Greek grow rusty. When I was serving on General Gordon's staff, I met a Millwood, in Clarke County, a Virginian of the old school who declaimed with fiery emphasis, in the original, choice passages of Demosthenes' tirade against Aeschines.¹⁶

Thucydides and Demosthenes spoke to the Southern understanding in the war and to Thucydides Gildersleeve devotes section five of the article, but most of all it is Aristophanes who awakened his interest and sympathy, and the remainder of the essay—section six—looks in personal terms back and forth between the circumstances of daily life, as Gildersleeve knew them in the war years, and as Aristophanes describes them in the war years he had known, especially in the *Acharnians*:

All these little details of daily hardship come back even now to the old student when he reopens his Aristophanes. No wonder that the ever present Peloponnesian war will not suffer him to forget those four years in which the sea of troubles rose higher and higher."

Thus the essay ends. It is highly personal, poignant, noble; there is throughout deliberate understatement, deliberate disguise of rigid organization and logical argumentation. There is, instead, a sensitive interaction of experience and literature. History is played off against literature, war against peace, tragedy against comedy, America against Greece.

For all its modesty, the little essay can be made the basis of some generalizations about the Classics in America. Eighteenth-century Americans found in the Classics useful knowledge about the things they wanted to understand. They found useful models of art and architecture which were republican and not English; they found useful models of political organization and of the operations of political institutions which could not be paralleled in modern Europe, but which illustrated their hopes or fears for American institutions. The Classics were an aesthetic standard and a human standard of man's condition. But eighteenth-century Americans were not scholars in a professional sense. They drew from antiquity, but rarely looked at it for its own sake. The impulse to scholarship was beginning to be felt in eighteenth-century Europe, by Winkelmann, for example, or Wolf or Bentley or Porson, but perhaps only James Logan in America understood what it was about. Scientific scholarship came to America slowly in the nineteenth century. Most specifically, it was brought back from Germany by a small company of Americans who pursued graduate study abroad at a time when no advanced work was offered at home. The American bachelor's degree had become common and now represented less of an achievement, comparatively speaking, than in the eighteenth century. Gildersleeve was one of these Argonauts, earning a Ph.D. at Göttingen in 1853. In his developing view of scholarship as a value in itself, he looked to the understanding of the Truth. For example, in his programmatic article and APA presidential address, "University Work in America and Classical Philology," he speaks as follows:

While special research has, it is true, the drawback that it tends to make the course of instruction less symmetrical, what is lost in the rounded completeness of form is more than made up by the kindling of life that goes forth every one who is engaged in the ardent quest of truth; and so thoroughly correlated is all knowledge, that there are subtle lines of connexion between the most remote region of scientific study which vitalize theme and method through the whole intervening space.¹⁴

Not content, then, to utilize the Peloponnesian war as a way of neatly describing the Civil war or as a way of making comments on war in the abstract, he looks back and forth between two concrete experiences and allows each to shed light on the other. It is this convertibility, this personal freedom to surmount the circumstances of time and place and share the lot of mankind with the Greeks and Romans in personal intimacy that seems to me the highest and most rewarding aspect of classical studies. It is a quality that Gildersleeve brought to American scholarship, one which helped him to survive the Civil war, and one which for all his fascination with philology and grammar brought him always back to an insistence on humanity as the subject of the Classics. This perception of the immediacy of the Classics, whether with Achilles in the

camp, with Antigone before Creon, with the Greeks at Syracuse, or with Horace on his Sabine farm, can still re-create and re-enhance the experience of us all. Send not to ask for whom the bell tolls. We are all "Southerners in a Peloponnesian war."

NOTES

1. Paul Shorey, "Fifty Years of Classical Studies in America," *TAPhA*, 50(1919), 60.
 2. Basil L. Gildersleeve, *The Creed of the Old South, 1865-1915*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1915).
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
 5. *Ibid.*, p. 45-46.
 6. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
 7. *Ibid.*, 73.
 8. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.
 9. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
 10. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
 11. *Ibid.*, 103.
 12. Basil L. Gildersleeve, *Essays and Studies, Educational and Literary* (Baltimore: N. Murray, 1890), p. 92.
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MILTON W. HUMPHREYS, AN APPALACHIAN ODYSSEUS*

By Joseph R. Berrigan

My current image of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Southern classicist is that of the Cheshire cat. I am referring not to its grin but to the slow process of its disappearance until hardly anything is left. For most of us what survives from such men as Gildersleeve and Humphreys is their name and wisps of bibliography. Most of us know that Humphreys published editions of the *Antigone* and the *Oration on the Crown*, but the man himself is as surely unknown as Benjamin Harrison or Chester Arthur. Humphreys, however, was a great man, an outstanding classicist, and he should be remembered at least by those of us who are either Southern or classicists or a touch of both. And yet he is a bare name. I fear, too, that he may be hardly that. His name does not appear in the indices of the first fifty years of the *Classical Journal*. When he died in 1928 no obituary appeared in its pages. As far as I can discover he made only one address to the Classical Association of the Middle West and South: in 1919, seven years after retiring from Virginia and nine years before his death. He spoke in Atlanta, or rather Decatur, at Agnes Scott, appropriately, for he was a Presbyterian and the father of four daughters. His topic that evening was the Roman pronunciation of Latin, which he always claimed he had been the first to introduce to this country, two years before Harvard. There is something fine about a man of seventy-four looking back to an early triumph and a lasting achievement, but his choice of subject, if he did choose it, is unfortunate at least for this reason: it may lead someone to believe that he was a Latinist. He of course did teach Latin, but his profession was that of a Hellenist; more precisely, that of a philologist; most precisely, that of a metrician.

My principal object, however, is not to analyze his contributions to the science of metrics. I am concerned with rescuing a marvelous man from the dust of the past and the cobwebs of forgetfulness. All of his achievements as a metrician, even if ably recounted, could hardly accomplish that. My object, frankly, is to praise a famous man, or a man who should be famous, if we Americans and Southerners ever get our priorities straightened out.

*This paper is based upon the typescript of Milton W. Humphreys' autobiography in the Alderman Library, University of Virginia. Also available in the same library is Humphreys' Civil War diary.

A more unpromising background than that from which Humphreys came can hardly be imagined. The very fact that he surmounted the obstacles testifies to the power of the man. He was born September 15, 1844, along Anthony's Creek, Greenbrier County, in what was then Virginia, now West Virginia. He was the seventh of twelve children born to his devout Scotch-Irish parents. His father was not quite all things to all men, but he was a justice of the peace, a colonel of the militia, and a self-educated physician. Once in a feverish delirium his father apparently thought of himself as being three men; the next morning one of his attendants asked him if he were then the judge, the colonel, or the doctor. Everyone knew that he had recovered when he immediately replied, "You are a fool." Growing up in the very heart of Appalachia and as one of the middle children in a large family, Humphreys could easily have lapsed into the life of a farmer, poorly educated, suspicious of the outside world and of learning, pious to a fault. This did not happen and there are basically two reasons why it did not; one has to do with the man and his endowments, the other has to do with the Presbyterian Church.

First, Humphreys was a remarkable human being, physically, emotionally, and intellectually. For instance, the first thing he remembered is that on his first birthday he decided to walk and began to do so then and there. He learned to read and write before he even went to the near-by private school, which soon disbanded anyway. His early education was essentially a matter of self-teaching. His first love was mathematics and he would always take his math book with him when he was herding the oxen. In those bucolic days he looked forward to being either an engineer or an artillerist.

Other people had other ideas. The first great turning point came when a visiting Presbyterian minister discovered the intellectual attainments and potentials of young Milton; the minister arranged to have him taught by his father, another Presbyterian minister, in Charleston, where the young boy first emerged into the larger world. There really can be no doubt what inspired these godly men—they saw in the youthful Humphreys a future Presbyterian minister. Their concern, then, was not simply altruistic but it did bear fruit, bizarre fruit, even perhaps heathen fruit in their eyes, but I am convinced that without the intervention of the Presbyterian Church Humphreys would never have risen above the life of Anthony's Creek. Humphreys always remained a Presbyterian, even a very active one, but hardly a Calvinist. He says that he could never understand, either as a child or a man, the plan of salvation. He concludes that he must have been introduced to Christian thought, to use his words, "in a reprehensible way." There was no way in which he would

allow himself to become a minister, but his sponsors and their friends were insistent. He found relief and justification in the comments of an Episcopal minister in Charleston, that it is God and not men who makes a man a minister.

After two years of preparation, Humphreys entered Washington College in the fall of 1860, but he was not destined to complete his education in the normal number of years. The Civil War intervened. As a Southern Democrat, he supported secession, at least he did so after Fort Sumter. His father, although Milton did not realize it at the time, was an ardent secessionist. This was not exactly a popular position in western Virginia, but, after all, they had named their rooster, back in the 1840's, Henry Clay and so must have been rabid Democrats in those days. Humphreys spent three years in the Confederate Army; he did not spend four because he was too young in 1861 to enlist. Those years were as important as any he ever spent; he was preternaturally proud of having been the First Gunner of Bryan's Battery.

The end of the war brought no GI Bill and on the Southern side there was crushing poverty, devastation, and hopelessness. The situation was even more bleak for Humphreys in 1865 than it had been ten years earlier. He had not finished even one year of college; four years had now intervened, years of unremitting toil and struggle. No one could have blamed him, nor would we, if he had not returned to college. But he did. He was constantly haunted by memories of Lexington and by college songs; most of all, he wanted to return because the new president of Washington College was Robert E. Lee. Humphreys did return to college, he did complete his work, and he came out first in his class. During those years Lee was more than an inspiration; he advised Humphreys, loaned him money, even gave him some woolen undershirts his wife had made for him during the war. Lee also gave him one memorable piece of advice: wherever you go, he said, walk. Humphreys did; on one occasion he walked more than four hundred and fifty miles during his summer vacation. If Humphreys had a hero, it was Lee, under whom he also began his teaching career.

This career would last for more than forty years and be broken only by a two-year stay in Germany to obtain a Ph.D. He began his studies at Berlin but transferred to Leipzig, where he was graduated in 1874. He returned to Washington and Lee for a year and then moved on to the newly founded university in Nashville, Vanderbilt. He would have remained in Lexington and during the next twelve years would have returned there, if he had been offered the chair in classical languages. He naturally refused positions as a professor of modern languages or

physics. This brings up an interesting point. He became a classicist not out of any burning desire to be a Hellenist but because he was appointed to teach the ancient languages at Washington College and felt he should receive the best education available; hence his stint in Germany. His natural talents lay more in the direction of mathematics or natural science, but Washington College did not need help there. It was, then, the want of his *alma mater* that made Humphreys embark on his classical career. Men still knew that he was talented in those other areas; in fact, he turned down a position on the faculty of the Johns Hopkins University because President Gilman offered him the professorship of physics. Humphreys had the remarkably refreshing idea that a person should be thoroughly educated for what he would teach, that professors should know what they talked about. Much later he would say that this lay at the root of his contributions to Washington and Lee and of his decision to accept the call to Vanderbilt. There he became the first professor of Greek; actually he became much more than that for he helped to shape the curriculum, the requirements for admission, advancement, and graduation. He even composed the diplomas and supervised their distribution. He always felt that his career had really begun with his acceptance of the position at Vanderbilt.

Vanderbilt was good for Humphreys intellectually. He continued his study and his publications. He became an influential member of the American Philological Association, read a series of papers at its annual conventions, and finally achieved the distinction of being the president of that illustrious body. By being at Vanderbilt, Humphreys added luster to that institution and in a rare demonstration of gratitude Vanderbilt conferred its first LL.D upon him during the last graduation exercises he supervised in 1883. Despite these honors, Vanderbilt's greatest contribution to Humphreys was his wife, Louise, the daughter of Chancellor Garland, whom he married two years after his coming to Nashville. They had four daughters and lived happily together, despite a horrific series of illnesses, until her death in 1902.

Every university has its dark side, even Vanderbilt, even when one is married to the chancellor's daughter. One major issue and one minor one clouded Humphreys' final years at Vanderbilt and prepared him to accept an offer from the University of Texas. The major issue was monetary or, better put, contractual. The governing board of the University unilaterally reduced the salaries of all professors; this was actually the second time that Humphreys had been dishonestly, he felt, dealt with. Instead of suing, the faculty signed a petition of protest. All who signed became marked men and were picked off, one by one

Humphreys signed and saw his fellow-signatories falling on all sides. He had fought in the Valley campaign and realized one of the next balls would strike him; so he looked around for another position. The minor matter, if we can so term it, was his religion. A practising, if not convinced, Presbyterian, he was an ugly duckling among the gaggle of Methodist geese at Vanderbilt. After being there for several years, Humphreys sensed the beginning of an affirmative action program, the replacement of non-Methodists by Methodists. He was, therefore, looking around for another position. As the president of the American Philological Association, he was in an ideal situation to find one.

What he found or what found him was even more of a challenge than he had faced eight years earlier. The state of Texas was founding a University, and Humphreys was one of the first professors employed. He encountered all sorts of challenges in Austin. To begin with, the buildings were not ready, so classes had to be held in the temporary capitol. The university was co-educational, a new experience for Humphreys, although he obviously found his women students both congenial and talented. The climate, the terrain, the flora and fauna were all new to him. He turned his inquisitive mind to study the latter, but he could never adjust to the climate. For four years he suffered, slowly wasting away. He never says so explicitly, but one can conclude that he felt that he had made a mistake in going to Austin. It was with great delight that he accepted the chair of Greek at Virginia in 1887. Not only was he in a sense returning home but he was also escaping the political interferences he had encountered in Texas. He had even been reported to the Senate Education Committee for wasting the people's money, i.e., spending eight dollars for a ten dollar copy of the seventh edition of Liddell and Scott when he was offered a fifth edition for only two dollars. He records a classic comment from one of the Senators, "But, sir, do you not realize that the older a Greek book is the better it is?"

His academic Odyssey was now over. For the next forty-one years he lived in Charlottesville and died there in 1928. He says very little about those years, except that he served diligently on a number of faculty committees, toured the old Valley battlefields with his daughters, taught his chosen subject to dwindling numbers of students, kept up his interest in artillery, astronomy, and botany, gave addresses, and wrote papers on a host of subjects. Until his death he lived in the same house he had moved into when he came to Charlottesville in 1887. Altogether he was a most amazing man, as attested by 850 of the most interesting pages of an autobiography anyone has written.

JEFFERSON, CALHOUN, AND THE SLAVERY DEBATE: THE CLASSICS AND THE TWO MINDS OF THE SOUTH

By Susan Ford Wiltshire

Careful analysis of Southern thought suggests that there have been not one but two classical traditions in the South. The first, closely associated with the American Enlightenment, turned to antiquity for models of free institutions, for the inspiration of striking personalities, and for gentle lessons in moral virtue.¹ The second was one of conservative reaction and sought in antiquity sanctions for maintaining existing customs and institutions. The former looked to the past in order to create the future; the latter looked to the past in order to justify the present. The former tended toward cosmopolitanism and diversity of thought; the latter, towards localism and homogeneity. Both traditions, however, share certain common characteristics: symbolism, selectivity, and utilitarianism in the unabashed application of the past to contemporary experience. My purpose is to examine these two Southern traditions as exemplified by their most striking representatives, Thomas Jefferson and John C. Calhoun, in their responses to the most critical issue in Southern history, the question of slavery.

That Jefferson was a Virginian and Calhoun a South Carolinian is significant. Vernon L. Parrington in his *Main Currents in American Thought* describes two Southern cultural traditions, one spreading out from Virginia into Kentucky, Tennessee, and—I would add—part of Texas, the other emanating from South Carolina and greatly influencing the intellectual and social climate of the Deep South, especially Alabama and Mississippi.² The former might be characterized as a frontier mentality, one of risk and expansion; the latter, as that of the plantation, of preservation of the status quo. Charlottesville and Charleston are not, of course, mutually exclusive, and the two traditions always intermingled with one another. Nevertheless they are useful as symbols, and in this subject it is imagery—mythology even—that we are really talking about.

If a rough geographical distinction between the two traditions can be suggested, so can a chronological one. The liberal tendency in the use of the Classics was essentially a phenomenon of the eighteenth century in America and characterized a small, rather aristocratic group of intellectuals active in public life during that period. The nineteenth

century was clearly the time of a conservative reaction and thus of a more conservative use of classical precedents. The transition from one mood to another started in the 1820's and was thoroughly hardened by 1831-32. In that period four things happened: William Lloyd Garrison published the first issue of his abolitionist newspaper the *Liberator* on January 1, 1831; Nat Turner's rebellion occurred in August of the same year; soon thereafter the slavery question was debated in the Virginia Legislature, the last time the question was discussed in the South under conditions of freedom of speech; finally, in May of 1832, Thomas R. Dew published his *Review of the Debates in the Virginia Legislature of 1831-1832*, which became a major formulation of the pro-slavery position and a centerpiece of the intellectual blockade constructed by the South. This is not to say that at one point the liberal tradition ended and the conservative one began; certainly there were nineteenth-century representatives of more liberal character, as I will show. Nevertheless, there was an almost awesome unanimity of thought throughout most of the nineteenth-century South, a unanimity which includes the uses of the Greek and Roman past.³

In times of controversy one appeals to the sanctions perceived to be most persuasive to the most people, and it should be conceded at the outset that the most numerous arguments on either side of the slavery debate derived not from Greece and Rome but from the Bible. The pervasive theme of the pro-slavery position is that slavery must be divinely ordained since it is mentioned so frequently in the Bible without criticism. In his *A Defense of Virginia*, for example, Robert Dabney proclaims: "Our best hope is in the fact that the cause of our defense is the cause of God's Word, and of its supreme authority over human conscience. For, as we shall evince, that Word is on our side, and the teachings of Abolitionism are clearly of rationalistic origin of infidel tendency, and only sustained by reckless and licentious perversions of the meaning of the Sacred text."⁴ Thomas R. Dew adds: "When we turn to the New Testament, we find not one single passage at all calculated to disturb the conscience of an honest slaveholder."⁵ Still another example comes from an anonymous Southern clergyman: "We say, therefore, slavery is inseparably connected with Gospel Church government, because, on Bible authority, slavery of some form, must necessarily exist in every well organized society."⁶ Abolitionists, of course, argued the opposite conclusion just as vigorously from the same source.

The predominantly religious rhetoric of the slavery debates contrasts sharply with the more numerous appeals to classical antiquity in the period of the formation of the Republic.⁷ This may reflect the notion of

the South as more traditionally religious, but it more likely indicates a difference between the nineteenth century and the eighteenth, in which the tolerant Deism of a Jefferson was much more acceptable in both the North and the South than it was to be later on, after waves of revivalism swept both sections of the country. In any case the Classics continued to be a vital part of the Southern consciousness.

As with much of the classical tradition in America, the figure of Aristotle serves as a touchstone for understanding the uses to which antiquity was put. To Jefferson, Aristotle was of little or no interest, since any political writing from Greece or Rome, he felt, was inadequate in that it lacked the idea of a representative democracy.⁸ Calhoun, on the other hand, was an ardent admirer. The attitudes of the two men are manifest in the advice regarding Aristotle each gave to young acquaintances. Jefferson wrote to Isaac H. Tiffany on August 26, 1816:

In answer to your inquiry as to the merits of Gillies' translation of the *Politics* of Aristotle, I can only say that it has the reputation of being preferable to Ellis', the only rival translation into English. . . . But so different was the style of society then, and with those people, from what it is now and with us, that I think little edification can be obtained from their writings on the subject of government. . . . The full experiment of a government democratical, but representative, was and is still reserved for us. . . . The introduction of this new principle of representative democracy has rendered useless almost everything written before on the structure of government; and, in a great measure, relieves our regret, if the political writings of Aristotle, or of any other ancient have been lost, or are unfaithfully rendered or explained to us.⁹

In reply to a similar request for advice, Calhoun counsels A.D. Wallace on December 17, 1840: "I would advise a young man with your views to make himself thoroughly acquainted with the history of the free states of antiquity and the history of England and our Country, and to read the best elementary treatises on Government, including Aristotle's, which I regard as among the best."¹⁰

The telling difference in these respective assessments has to do with Aristotle's formulation of the organic theory of society, which maintains that the needs of the polity supersede those of the individual, who is born into a certain place with the function of contributing to the welfare of the whole from that position. That organic theory contrasts radically with the ideals of the Enlightenment dear to Jefferson, in which the welfare of the individual supersedes that of society. Jefferson was committed to the idea of the social contract and to a "natural aristocracy" based on virtue and talent rather than birth, position, or wealth.

The Virginian's life-long opposition to slavery¹¹ was thoroughly consistent with this view of a natural aristocracy, and it is in a discussion of Greek literature with John Adams that his position about the natural aristocracy is most succinctly developed. In a series of letters in 1813 the

two men discuss the meaning of the poem of that arch-conservative elegist Theognis, part of which Adams translates as follows: "When We want to purchase, Horses, Asses or Rams, We inquire for the Wellborn. And every one wishes to procure, from the good Breeds."¹² Adams sees this as a compelling statement of the divinely ordained reality of an aristocracy of birth. Jefferson differs, suggesting an ethical rather than a political interpretation of the poem, and defines the grounds of a natural aristocracy as those of virtue and talents as opposed to a pseudo-aristocracy of wealth and birth. "The natural aristocracy," he writes, "I consider as the most precious gift of nature for the instruction, the trusts, and government of society. And indeed it would have been inconsistent in creation to have formed man for the social state, and not to have provided virtue and wisdom enough to manage the concerns of the society."¹³

Jefferson's interpretation of the conservative statement of Theognis illustrates his genuine scholarly interest in antiquity but also his tendency to fit the past into the liberal mold of his own character. It was that same liberal character which made Jefferson such an opponent of slavery. There are ambiguities, to be sure, in Jefferson's relationship to the slavery issue, not the least of which was his failure to emancipate his slaves in his own lifetime.¹⁴ (Henry Steele Commager, in fact, calls the failure to extinguish slavery "the most tragic failure of the American Enlightenment."¹⁵) Nevertheless, Jefferson's clear and insistent voice on this subject formed a powerful legacy and contributes significantly to his seminal position in the liberal mind of the South.

If Jefferson was the first great thinker-politician of the South, John C. Calhoun was the last. In fact, he has been seen as the last major political theorist to play an active role in American politics.¹⁶ Although he began his career as a Jeffersonian and a nationalist, he had become by the late 1820's an ardent defender of states' rights; by 1838 he could say of the institution of slavery: "Many in the South once believed that it was a moral and political evil. That folly and delusion are gone. We see it now in its true light, and regard it as the most safe and stable basis for free institutions in the world."¹⁷

Calhoun nourished with special zeal a contempt for the proposition that all men are created equal. "We now begin to experience," he proclaimed in his speech on the Oregon Bill in 1848, "the danger of admitting so great an error to have a place in the Declaration of our Independence. For a long time it lay dormant; but in the process of time it began to germinate, and produce its poisonous fruits. It had strong

hold on the mind of Mr. Jefferson, the author of that document, which caused him to take an utterly false view of the subordinate relation of the black to the white race in the South, and to hold, in consequence, that the latter, though utterly unqualified to possess liberty, were as fully entitled to both liberty and equality as the former, and that to deprive them of it was unjust and immoral [sic].¹⁸

The most comprehensive statement of Calhoun's political theory is his *A Disquisition on Government*, completed shortly before his death in 1850. In that document he argues forcefully against a state of nature in which individuals have certain rights inherently, concluding instead that all people are born into a social and political state in which they are not free and equal but subject to laws and institutions.¹⁹ The specter of slavery is not far away from such a view; in the same document he writes: "It follows . . . that it is a great and dangerous error to suppose that all people are equally entitled to liberty. It is a reward to be earned, not a blessing to be gratuitously lavished on all alike; — a reward reserved for the intelligent, the patriotic, the virtuous and deserving; — and not a boon to be bestowed on a people too ignorant, degraded and vicious, to be capable either of appreciating or of enjoying it."²⁰

In the *Disquisition* Calhoun refers at length to the experience of the Roman Republic, particularly to the tribunate and the balance of powers,²¹ but nowhere does he call upon Aristotle as an authority. His contemporary William J. Grayson, however, writing in *DeBow's Review* in 1860, makes the Aristotelian antecedent explicit:

The maxim of Mr. Calhoun is, that a democratic government cannot exist unless the laboring class be slaves; . . . This is the substance of the dogma. It is not a new thing, but is two thousand years old. So far from being 'first enumerated' by Mr. Calhoun, it is as ancient as Aristotle. In his 'Politics'—which should be a textbook in all Southern colleges—in words as clear and emphatic as language can furnish, he lays down the maxim, that *a complete household or community is one composed of freemen and slaves*. . . . The whole proposition, both as to slavery itself and the race of the slave, is distinctly stated by the Greek philosopher.²²

It was this conservative use of the Greek and Roman past that carried the day in the nineteenth century. Out of a multitude of examples in addition to Calhoun, I will give two. Thomas R. Dew, classicist and president of the College of William and Mary, wrote: "It has been contended that slavery is unfavorable to a republican spirit; but the whole history of the world proves that this is far from being the case. In the ancient republics of Greece and Rome, where the spirit of liberty glowed with most intensity, the slaves were more numerous than the freemen. Aristotle, and the great men of antiquity, believed slavery necessary to keep alive the spirit of freedom."²³ In another broadside a

Southern clergyman concludes: "How came the distinguished heathen Republics of Greece and Rome to flourish for many centuries, having the Institution of slavery at the foundation as the palladium of their Constitution? How happens it, too, that the Republics of the Southern portion of the United States have worked so well, some of them for sixty odd years? So far from the Institution of slavery being incompatible with the genius of Republicanism, it is the great conservative feature of any Republic."²⁴

The liberal classical tradition did find successors to Jefferson in the nineteenth century, however rare. One of them was a Virginian named Jesse Burton Harrison, highly trained in the Classics, who wrote a refutation of the pro-slavery argument in 1833. In that disertation he urges the young men of Virginia not to fear the unpopularity attendant on championing such a cause, invoking the name of Jefferson, the "Great Democrat," and quoting Cicero's warning in *De Officiis* that in great enterprises some are called to risk their lives, some their reputation, and some the good will of their fellow citizens. (*alii de vita, alii de gloria, et benevolentia civium in discrimen vocantur*—Cic. *de Off.* I. 24. 22.)²⁵ Another successor, I suggest, was Sam Houston, who, while not a scholarly classicist by any means, was said to have memorized all 500 pages of Pope's translation of the *Iliad* as a youth and whose oratorical style and sense of history were indelibly marked by the Classics.²⁶ In his first address to Congress, for example, he likened Henry Clay to Ajax in the thick of battle, and on another occasion he compared the heroes of the Alamo to Leonidas and the Spartans and Thermopylae.²⁷ It was Houston's support of the admission of Oregon as a free state, with slavery expressly prohibited, that identified him among Southerners with the Abolitionist cause; together with Thomas Hart Benton he cast one of the two decisive votes for the Oregon Bill in the summer of 1848, thus winning the undying enmity of Calhoun and being considered a betrayer of his region. With that single vote, as one Charleston newspaper put it, "The South has been beaten by the South."²⁸

The two classical traditions I have identified are both intimately involved with the course of Southern history, which in itself suggests the utilitarian nature of classical tastes. The past was studied not out of objective curiosity but for subjective symbols and images with which to address contemporary experience. Preferences in ancient authors were selective according to felt biases and needs. Both the liberal and the conservative classical traditions were vital enterprises precisely because of the close association the South has long maintained between literature and life.

NOTES

1. See the discussion of Henry Steele Commager, *Jefferson, Nationalism, and the Enlightenment* (New York, 1975), p. 130ff.
2. Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought* (New York, 1927, 1930), II, 3-4.
3. Clement Eaton, *Freedom of Thought in the Old South* (Durham, 1940) provides a detailed account of the intellectual barricade erected around the South in this period.
4. Robert L. Dabney, *A Defense of Virginia (and Through Her, of the South)* (New York, 1867), p. 21.
5. Harper, Hammond, Simms, and Dew, *The Pro-Slavery Argument* (Charleston, 1852), p. 452.
6. "A Defence of Southern Slavery, Against the Attacks of Henry Clay and Alex'r Campbell," by a Southern clergyman (Hamburg, S.C., 1851), p. 6. The author is identified on the cover of the pamphlet as Iveson L. Brookes.
7. Commager, 131, points out the difference: "It is difficult to know how serious, or even how useful, these antecedents were. No doubt some of the interest in them was rhetorical, and some of it mere intellectual window-dressing. But the point is that the persuasive rhetoric took *this* form, not any other; that the appealing window-dressing was classical, not, let us say, religious."
8. For a discussion of the absence of that concept in Greek and Roman political thought, see Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, ed., *Representation* (New York, 1969), pp. 1-2.
9. *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Andrew A. Lipscomb (Washington, 1904), XV, 65-66.
10. *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1899*, II, 469.
11. It is significant that Jefferson's first political move in his first elected office was his effort in the Virginia House of Burgesses to receive permission for the emancipation of slaves. See his autobiography in *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Adrienne Koch and William Peden (New York, 1944), p. 5.
12. *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*, ed. Lester J. Cappon (Chapel Hill, 1959), II, 365.
13. Cappon, II, 388.
14. D. B. Davis, *Was Thomas Jefferson an Authentic Enemy of Slavery?* (Oxford, 1970) concludes that Jefferson's sympathies were ultimately those of the planter class which he represented. What Davis fails to take into account, however, is that many of Jefferson's efforts centered on undermining the very foundations of that class, e.g. his attacks of primogeniture and entail.
15. Commager, p. 22.
16. *Calhoun, Basic Documents*, ed. John M. Anderson (State College, Pa., 1952) p. 5.
17. In "Remarks on the State Rights Resolutions in Regard to Abolition," January 12, 1838. *The Works of John C. Calhoun*, ed. Richard K. Cralle (Charleston, 1851-56), III, 180.
18. *Calhoun, Basic Documents*, p. 295.
19. *Calhoun, Basic Documents*, pp. 65-66.
20. *Calhoun, Basic Documents*, pp. 63-64.
21. *Calhoun, Basic Documents*, pp. 87-89.
22. William J. Grayson, "Mackay's Travels in America, The Dual Form of Labor," *De Bow's Review*, 28 (1860), 59-60. See also George Fitzhugh, "The Politics and Economics of Aristotle and Mr. Calhoun," *De Bow's Review*, 23 (1857), 163-172.

23. Harper, Hammond, Simms, and Dew, *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, p. 461.
 24. "A Defence of Southern Slavery . . . ," p. 44.
 25. J. Burton Harrison, "The Slavery Question in Virginia," (Richmond 1832) in *Arís Sonís Focísque, The Harrisons of Skimina*, ed. Fairfax Harrison (1910), pp. 398-99.
 26. Charles Lester, *The Life of Sam Houston* (New York, 1855), p. 21. See also Susan Ford Wiltshire, "Sam Houston and the *Iliad*," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 32 (Fall, 1973), 249-254.
 27. Llerena Friend, "Sam Houston—Bio-bibliographical," *Texas Grand Lodge Magazine* (March, 1957), 114.
 28. Quoted by Donald Braider, *Solitary Star, A Biography of Sam Houston* (New York, 1974), p. 255.
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THE WHITE-COLUMN TRADITION: CLASSICAL ARCHITECTURE AND THE SOUTHERN MYSTIQUE

By Robert Gamble

The pillared portico is still very much a standard fixture in the mythology surrounding the Old South. Decades of hashing and re-hashing the reality behind the legends about the ante-bellum South have failed to unseat the classic-style colonnade as the popular embodiment of the plantation tradition. With a glib turn of phrase like "the porticoed mansions along the James"—as *Time* magazine recently, and not so aptly, described the eighteenth-century greathouses of Tidewater Virginia—the media can still evoke sentimental images of a whole way of life.¹ Cinema and television retain the columned veranda as one of the standard backdrops for stories with a Southern setting, from the funky thriller *Hush, Hush, Sweet Charlotte* of a few years ago to the bitter *Mandingo* or the poignant *Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*. Clearly, the image of the classic portico perennially embowered with magnolias shows scant sign of fading, either as a familiar convention through which Southerners view their own culture or as a handy stereotype that non-Southerners attach to the South.

Historians and architectural historians have frequently abetted this popular image, seeing the planter-gentry's affinity for classical architecture and the pillared veranda to be, as Vernon Parrington maintained, a proud, self-conscious index of "the pronounced drift of Southern thought in the years immediately preceding the Civil War, toward the ideal of a [slave-based] Greek democracy."² Southern apologists, so goes this argument, seized upon the classic revival in architecture, much as they did social and philosophical precedent in classic antiquity, to articulate their defense against a mounting criticism of slavery. "For Southern aristocracy," observes one well-known art historian, "Greek and Roman architecture was the symbol and the assurance that sound society could perfectly well combine the ideals of liberty with the institution of slavery Greek temples were in Southern eyes practically a statement of the Southern way of life."³ In view of such retrospective pronouncements, perhaps the "white-column tradition" in Southern residential architecture merits a closer examination.

Popular, romantic association of classical architecture with a "Southern way of life" heightens the irony that classicism was also

America's first truly national style. If, by the mid-1800's, white-columned houses dotted the Southern countryside, they could also be found along the Hudson and the Schuylkill and on the shores of the Great Lakes. Yet it is probably true that the ante-bellum South—especially the Deep South—seized upon classical architecture and the classic-style portico with an enthusiasm unequaled by any other region of the country. Still, within the South itself, classical expressions in architecture varied considerably, for the region was no more homogeneous in an architectural sense than it was socially, economically, or politically. Rather, neoclassicism tended to mold itself to local building traditions and to local circumstances with a resulting diversity that can only be suggested here.

Never would the older, seaboard South accept the Greek phase of the neoclassical revival to the degree that did the raw new plantation country of the lower South. And seldom in the domestic building of the older Southern states was the heavy Greek Doric colonnade employed with the unabashed vigor one sees in the classic-style mansions of the lower Piedmont and the Gulf region. In Virginia especially, housebuilders and their planter-clients clung to the restrained neo-Roman forms of classicism's first architectural flowering in America—the idiom favored by Thomas Jefferson—long after the preference for Roman architectural orders began to give way in the 1820's and 1830's to a rage for the Hellenic. As a rule, porticoes in Virginia would remain lighter, less overpowering, than the monumental piazzas which came into favor in the Deep South. Likewise, in the graceful homes of the Kentucky Bluegrass and Middle Tennessee, there is a certain reserve to the classical spirit. Here, columns were wedded to a highly developed late Federal style of domestic architecture, evolving a common house-type characterized by a tall, rather narrow central portico composed of two pairs of slender columns, usually Doric or Ionic, framing the main doorway (Figure 1).

The Gulf states were still largely wilderness when, about 1812, the Yankee architect Levi Weeks introduced a classical note into the domestic architecture of Natchez, then an outpost of wealth and culture on the old southwestern frontier. At "Auburn" (Figure 2) and other early Natchez mansions, Weeks, who was probably influenced by the work of Boston architect Charles Bulfinch, relied on the airy, almost feminine proportions that were New England's reinterpretation of Roman classicism in designing the wide, deep verandas essential to the climate of the Lower Mississippi Valley.

Not for another two decades, however, would the monumental portico of popular legend, conceived on an expansive scale and sweeping grandly



Figure 1. "Waveland" (1847), near Lexington, Ky.



Figure 2. "Auburn" (1812), Natchez, Miss. In what is probably the earliest classic-style portico to be found on any house in the Gulf region, Auburn's New England-born architect followed the same neo-Roman forms popularized by Thomas Jefferson in Virginia.

across the entire front of a house and sometimes around two, three, or all four sides, began to appear in the Deep South. But between 1830 and the outbreak of the Civil War, such colonnades mushroomed throughout the emerging cotton and sugar cane kingdom that eventually stretched from Georgia to East Texas.

An immeasurable influence in the spread of neoclassical architecture through the lower South was the fact that popular acceptance of the Greek Revival by Americans coincided with the first great wave of cotton and sugar cane prosperity—the “flush times” as contemporaries called the period. It is not surprising, then, that the Grecian style came quickly southward, brought from the Northeast to booming New Orleans and Mobile, and to the hinterlands they served, by New York-trained architects like James Gallier and the Dakin brothers, who were attracted to Dixie by the economic boom.

But the diffusion of classical motifs to the remotest corners of the region owed far less to the influence of professional architects than it did to the popular builders’ handbooks which issued from Eastern presses. Page after page bearing detailed engravings of the various classical orders introduced countless country carpenters to the Greek Revival, while the text and accompanying diagrams showed how properly to glue up a wooden column shaft or to fashion a fluted triglyph or a scrolled Ionic capital. With “a saw in one hand and a book of instructions in the other,”⁴ these anonymous craftsmen made classicism, or at least their version of it, the predominant architectural theme of the ante-bellum South and the Southern plantation, and, in the process, unwittingly contributed to a legend.

The houses they built were seldom academic representations of neoclassicism, with correctly proportioned temple-type façades and appropriately adorned entablature and pediment. But as W. J. Cash has pointed out in his penetrating study, *The Mind of the South*, the houses were large and white-painted, so that in this crude, semi-frontier land of wide fields and spreading pinewoods they seemed very imposing.⁵

Where a formal temple-type portico did appear, as for example at the elegant “Madewood” on Louisiana’s Bayou Lafourche (Figure 3), it was likely to be the product of a skilled professional architect and, inevitably, lost some of the regional freshness of less sophisticated essays. The façade of Madewood is, in fact, strikingly similar to that of “Rose Hill” in western New York, to choose one from among several nearly-identical Northern counterparts.



Figure 3. "Madewood" (1840-48), near Napoleonville, La.

Generalizations can be as misleading as they are instructive, but if we may venture a "typical" residence evolved out of the vernacular Greek Revival of the lower South, it would probably be a great square dwelling—sometimes brick, more often frame—with four to six massive Doric columns across the front and a small cantilevered balcony or full-length gallery at the second-story level (Figure 4). A low hipped roof, not a pedimented gable, crowned the whole affair and was sometimes ennobled by a rooftop observatory. Inside the better houses, the classical spirit also prevailed in the woodwork of the central hallway and of the spacious square rooms to either side—here again based on plates from such handbooks as the widely-used *Modern Builder's Guide*, by Minard Lafever. Classical architraves framed the principal doorways, while the mantelpieces in the more pretentious parlors might be fashioned of marble and even vaunt a couple of caryatids.

If country craftsmen often seemed remarkably indifferent to classical proportions in the lanky columns and top-heavy entablatures they constructed, they could also display ingenuity in their efforts to achieve a vaguely classical effect, suggesting the foliage of a Corinthian capital—and a square one at that—by vertical rows of crude wooden tendrils (Figure 5), to cite only one of several such unorthodox departures.

But as an adaptation to local conditions, the classic-style colonnade achieved nothing short of impressive grandeur in lower Louisiana. In the traditional plantation house of the region, early French colonists had created a habitation eminently suited to its environment, with parasol roof, deep surrounding galleries, and a main floor raised well above the semi-tropical dampness. As neoclassicism gained favor, the old French-style plantation house was simply enlarged upon—sometimes quite literally—garnished with classical details, and sheathed with heavy columns or square piers surmounted by an appropriately executed entablature. The result was a fresh sort of classicism, seemingly native-grown and extraordinarily suited to its setting and to the gregarious life of the planter. Little wonder that, seen at the end of an avenue of moss-hung liveoaks, columns gleaming in the afternoon sunlight, classicized versions of this folk archetype such as the lovely "Oak Alley" (Figure 6) above New Orleans stir images, even today, of some dreamlike Southern



Figure 4. Johnston-Cartwright House (c. 1845), Tuskegee, Ala.

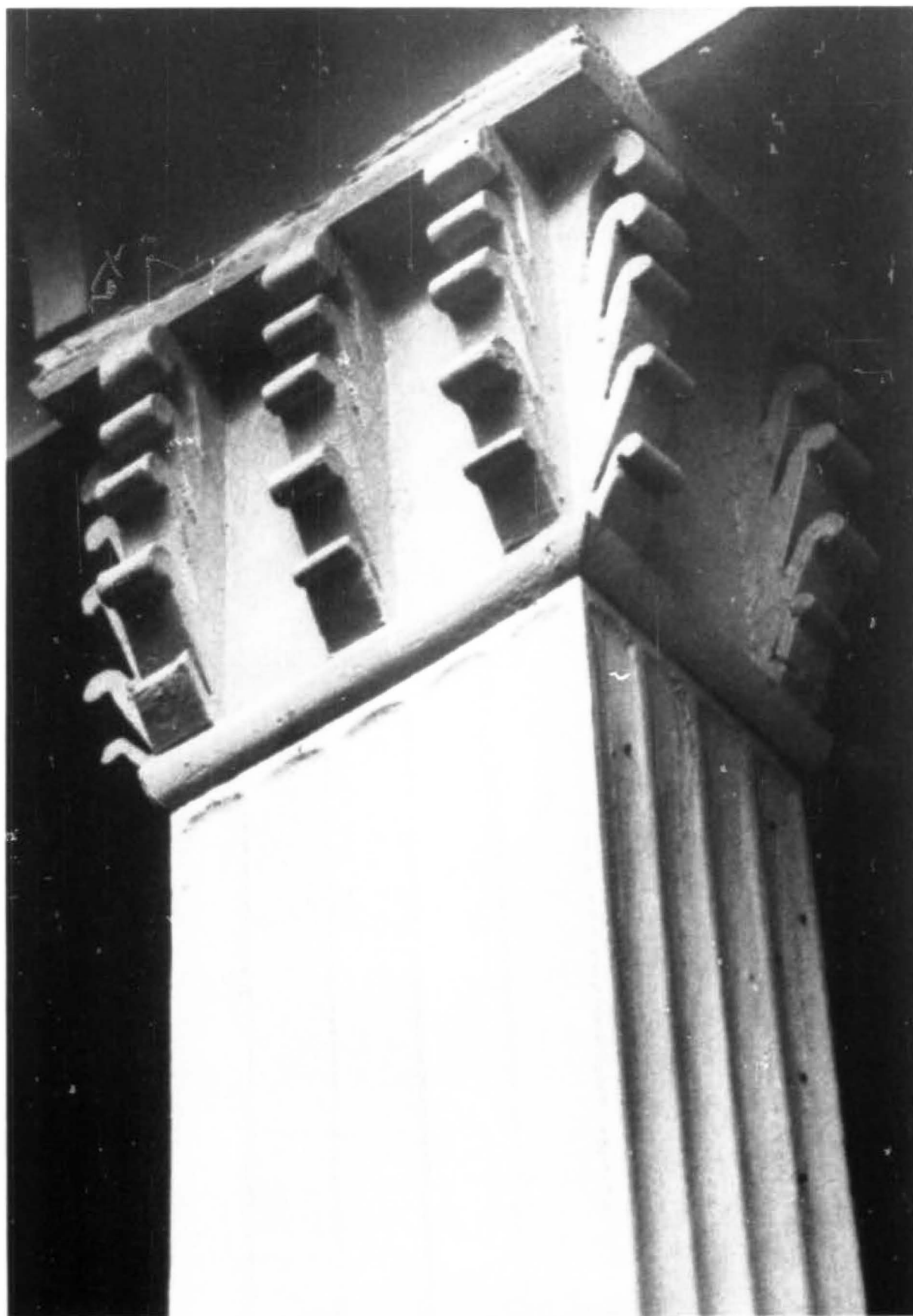


Figure 5. Ballard House (c. 1850), Monticello, Ga. (photo by Robbie Hattaway courtesy of John Linley)



Figure 6. "Oak Alley" (1838-39), near Vacherie, La. A neo-classical mansion developed from the traditional Louisiana plantation house-type.

recognizably classical in spirit. They worshipped in classic-style churches. They scattered pseudo-Grecian and Roman Statuary through their gardens, and sometimes even adorned their privies with rudimentary classic pilasters. They might conduct plantation business from a tiny, porticoed estate office (Figure 7). And, at the last, they might be laid to rest in a Grecian-style vault or under a monument embellished with acroteria and egg-and-dart molding. But at the height of the Greek Revival, Americans everywhere were experiencing classicism as a decorative art form in much the same way.

The truth is that most people, alas, do not think in very lofty terms regarding either architectural preferences or their particular manner of living. A style is normally followed because it is fashionable, or because it happens to please one's fancy at the time, or simply because it is convenient. And the average Southern planter was no exception, if we are to judge from contemporary accounts and his letters and diaries. The price of cotton, sugar cane, or tobacco, the rise of the river, and the county election far more excited his interest than the development of an abstract defensive *Weltanschauung*, pushed to the point of an architectural statement.

"Berry Hill," completed about 1840, is one of the few large Greek Revival-style plantation mansions in Virginia, although one of the most important anywhere. Its builder, James Coles Bruce, owned ten plantations scattered from the Old Dominion to Louisiana and was reckoned to be one of the largest slaveholders in the South. His great temple-front home, however, was not inspired by any affinity Bruce felt between Hellenic forms and Southern civilization, but rather by a chance visit to "Andalusia," the Parthenon-inspired residence of Philadelphia financier Nicholas Biddle—as avid a Grecophile himself as any in nineteenth-century America. Interestingly, at least one Bruce descendant regards Berry Hill's mammoth Doric colonnade as having been built "strictly for show"—to impress, alike, country neighbors and visiting guests.⁶

Greek Revival motifs did indeed lend themselves to ostentation, to "a maximum of impressiveness at a minimum of cost." Asher Benjamin tacitly acknowledged as much when explaining the new taste for the Greek Revival in the 1830 edition of his influential handbook, *The Practical House Carpenter*. Grecian elements, he said, were easily visible at a distance, besides being relatively cheap and simple to execute.⁸ In a society "on the make," which the Deep South and the rest of pre-Civil War America was, the giant wooden or stucco-covered brick colonnade was a bold announcement of standing and success. Often, such a

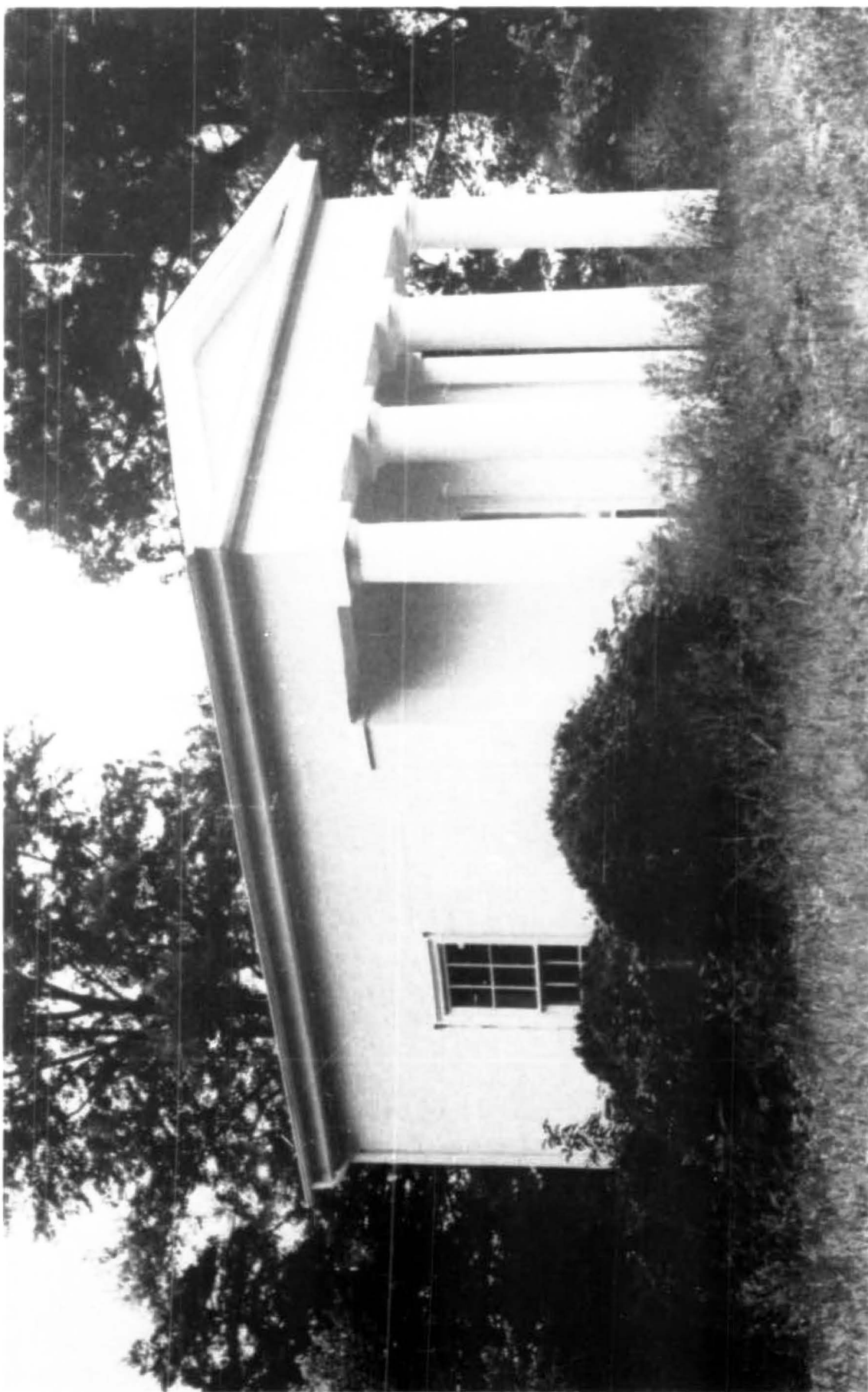


Figure 7. Plantation Office, "Berry Hill" (c. 1835-40), Halifax County, Va.

colonnade was tacked on in order to dignify an otherwise modest dwelling—the wooden entablature sometimes terminating abruptly where the colonnade joined the house. The entablature itself was, in fact, likely to be a false-front construction, projecting several feet above the actual roofline.

Yet if sheer pretension figured in the popularity of the oversized Grecian portico, the genuine climatic and social importance of a spacious porch—a “gallery” or “veranda” or “piazza” as antebellum Southerners were fond of calling it—should by no means be discounted. In our own age of air-conditioning, instant communication, and canned distraction, we risk overlooking the significant role of the porch in nineteenth-century American life, particularly in the South.

Southerners lived much of their domestic life on porches. An English visitor to the Middle Georgia plantation country in 1839 noted that porch-sitting was “a habit common to all Americans, but universal in the South.” The need of a porch for long, languorous summers is obvious; less so is its social importance in an isolated rural society. One senses that an attractive veranda which bespoke refinement and civilized greeting was not only a badge of prestige in the Old South, but a sort of symbolic contact point with the outside world. An early writer on classicism in Southern architecture even attributed the popularity of the pillared portico solely to the importance of the veranda in Southern life: a wide, shady piazza was a necessity in the Deep South, and classic-style columns happily answered the need both in terms of utility and adornment. That was all there was to it.¹⁰

Nevertheless, we may still ask what it was that animated a rare individual like the Alabama planter Nathan Bryan Whitfield. Starting in 1842 and continuing over a period of eighteen years, Whitfield lovingly crafted his plantation home, “Gaineswood,” into a unique classical ambience perhaps unparalleled in the South. One can almost imagine the low-profiled house, with its walled forecourt and templed gazebo, to be a Mediterranean villa. Inside, classical detail is lavished everywhere: paterae, anthemias, denticulated moldings, recessed domes studded with palmettes, Corinthian columns and pilasters gracing a handsome ballroom and the sitting-bay of the mistress’ bedroom (Figure 8), and finally a sleeping alcove for the master set discreetly behind a screen of



Figure 8. Ballroom, "Gaineswood" (1842-60), Demopolis, Ala.

was gaining momentum. A *retardataire* classicism would linger in some of the more isolated areas until even after the Civil War, but the great day of classical architecture was over. If the fifties saw the construction of the palatial, column-encircled "Windsor" overlooking the Mississippi between Natchez and Vicksburg, and of the magnificent "Belle Grove" further downriver, more and more rich Southerners followed the national architectural taste in a decidedly eclectic turn to the "Italian-villa" style, the neo-Gothic, and the so-called "Moorish." Ornate brackets replaced dentiled cornices, and Tudoresque arches were substituted for triglyphs and metopes and Doric pillars. Belle Grove (Figure 9) was, in fact, classical only in its lavish decorative elements. Its asymmetry and picturesque massing were decidedly Victorian in spirit.

Insofar as architecture was even considered in the nascent movement for Southern cultural independence during the 1850's, neither neoclassicism nor other derivative styles were advocated, but, instead, a practical, wholly indigenous form. The patriotic agricultural journal, *Soil of the South*, urged Southerners to build "not a gew-gaw palace, but a substantial, comfortable house" with an "airy porch for our hot summers, and yet close and comfortable rooms for our chilly, changing seasons."¹ Imitative styles were even ridiculed, and there seems to be little evidence that Southerners on the eve of the Civil War associated neoclassical architecture and the classic-style portico with the virtues of a peculiarly Southern way of life.

During the post-Civil War decades, domestic building in the South—and there was more of it than is generally realized—reflected the gingerbread Victorian fashions of the rest of the country, though piazzas might be a bit broader and ceilings higher. But the cult of the Lost Cause was in ferment, and by century's end both the ante-bellum period and the "War" were sufficiently distant in time to be laved in a golden haze of romantic nostalgia. In such an atmosphere, the Classical portico began to emerge as a *leitmotif* of Southern lore. Genre writers like Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page encouraged this trend. Recalling his Georgia boyhood "before the War," Harris thrilled a new generation of Southerners with tales of the old plantation and sentimental descriptions of "the stately house on a wooded hill, the huge white pillars . . . rising high enough to catch the reflections of a rosy sunset." Page peopled these



Figure 9. "Belle Grove" (c. 1855-57), near Donaldsonville, La. (photo by Frances Benjamin Johnston courtesy Library of Congress)

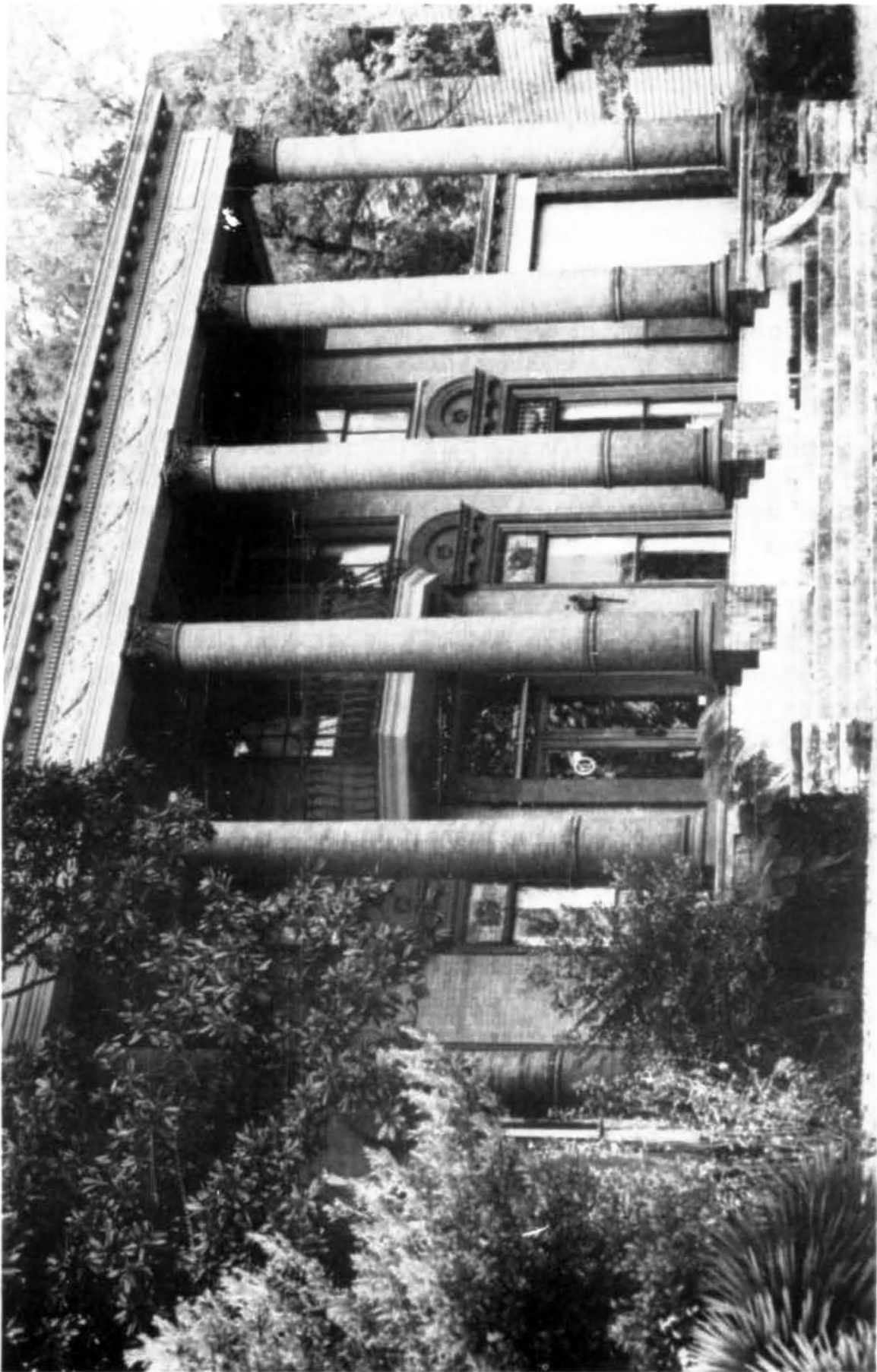


Figure 10. Dasher-Stevens House (1904), Macon, Ga.

styles," Southerners were turning "once more to the taste of their fathers."¹³ Actually, behind imposing colonnades often far more elaborate than their ante-bellum prototypes, Victorian leaded glass and terracotta remained, along with a happy jumble of other non-classical features.

The image was fixed, however, and it gathered luster in fiction and on stage and screen through the twenties and thirties. Starting in 1932, the annual Natchez "Pilgrimage" became one of the first of the famous Southern house tours, drawing thousands each spring to troop through the old columned mansions and to fan the flames of romantic unreality. The climax of the myth-making came, of course, with Hollywood's spectacular film version of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*.

Decades of devoted nurturing finds the white-column tradition still very much alive in the domestic architecture of today's South. Scaled-down versions of famous Southern homes like Andrew Jackson's "Hermitage" are built with varying degrees of aesthetic success in affluent suburbs and in aspiring small towns that did not even exist at the time of the Civil War. And in Macon, Georgia, a prim little Greek Revival-style playhouse seems perfectly at home on the lawn of one of the city's noted residences. Since World War II, official homes for the Governors of Louisiana, Florida, and Georgia have been constructed in costly imitation of the classic-style ante-bellum mansion. (From the outset, Georgia's new executive mansion, completed in the late 1960's, was candidly hailed by the local press as "dream stuff—a handsome dream of the Old South".¹⁴) The State of Mississippi proudly displays a pedimented portico as its official state "welcome" sign on the new interstate highways, and on a busy thoroughfare in southern Virginia, the "Plantation Drive-In" theater sports an oversized colonnade across the rear of the large outdoor movie screen.

It is not altogether surprising that one of the first nationally circulated photographs of aspiring Presidential candidate Jimmy Carter showed him relaxing in the familiar setting of a columned veranda. If the image was contrived, it was nonetheless instantly understood as giving Carter an identity—firm, unmistakable roots in a definite region and a definite sub-culture. It may be a tribute to the white-column image—too

for serious and systematic historical study."¹⁵ And possibly, viewing the South's white-column tradition in this context, we acknowledge a truth held by the ancients: that folk myths, mystiques, legends—white-column or otherwise—remain a fundamental, even vital bonding agent in human society.

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